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BODILY FLUIDS

special issue edited by

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The *InterAlia* editorial board proudly and gratefully presents the *Bodily Fluids* issue, whose guest editors – **Michael O'Rourke** (independent scholar), **Kamillea Aghtan** (independent scholar) and **Karin Sellberg** (University of Queensland) – have assembled a number of fascinating contributions. Many thanks! As was the case with the previous themed issue (8/2013, published in Polish), guest editors directed the selection and editorial process while observing the peer review standard normally employed at *InetrAlia*. We plan to continue publishing guest-edited thematic issues, as indicated in our published calls.



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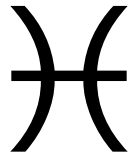
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PART ONE



The Big Secret About Queer Theory...

Michael O'Rourke

Sex essentially exceeds itself, which is why it is
essentially exciting.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality*, p. 15.

Queer *Parrhesia* and the New Pornography

Leo Bersani has quite the knack for producing grenade-lobbing, disturbance causing first sentences. His infamously titled essay "Is The Rectum a Grave?" begins with the now equally infamous line: "there is a big secret about sex: most people don't like it"¹ (Bersani, 2010, p. 3). And Bersani goes on to demonstrate that this aversion to sex can take on both benign and malignant forms. The argument I would like to make here is that queer theory has a similar secret. Or, rather, that queer theory is a little bit more than ambivalent about what it would like to *secrete*.

He wanted me to come first.

I like to jerk myself off while I'm being fucked.

My ass clenched down so hard it hurt his dick.

I scooped up some of my cum and stuck it inside his lower lip

(Stockton and Gilson, 2014, p. 22)

My incendiary Bersani-like opening gambit then is this: "There is a big secret about queer theory: it doesn't like to talk about sex". Or more precisely it doesn't like to talk about the *messy* kinds of sex bodies have or the fluids emitted from bodies whether alone or entangled with others. What interests Bersani "is something else" which is a certain "*aversion*", an aversion that is not the same thing as a repression and that can coexist quite comfortably with, say, the most enthusiastic endorsement of polysexuality with multiple sex partners" (Bersani, "Is the Rectum", p. 4). What

interests me about the sex-aversiveness of current queer theory is that it can coexist quite easily with queer theory's idea of itself as sexy, transgressive, transitive, fluid, dirty, unruly, and so on. But the truth of the matter is that queer theory has a lot to say about *sexuality* but very little to tell us about *sex*². It is so hung up on identity that it forgets about sex acts which have little or nothing to do with identity at all. Sex is what is unbearable, even humiliating, for queer theory and in saying that I agree with Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant that it is not sex itself which is unbearable but rather the contradictory aversiveness which Bersani outlines above which it is difficult for queer theorists to bear⁶. The task of the queer *parrhesiast* is to *tell it like it is* (Foucault). *Parrhesia*, as Foucault describes it, is a form of truth-telling which engages the carnal and the body, the sensual and the sexual, sex and sweat. As Johnny Golding explains it *parrhesia* is a queer knowledge-practice which requires courage and involves risk:

it is the courage to speak out, to provoke, to incite into action without taking oneself out of the relationship; to invent anew by supposing 'it could be otherwise' and then figuring out how this 'otherwise' might become real, alive, take root and flourish, without preventing the 'telling it as it is' from being heard ... Not shock for shock's sake; not offence just because it could be done; not a sterile rationality backing any decision; but rather, a kind of connection, a certain kind of care and attention to detail; a certain kind of courage, curiosity, stylistics of existence, generosity, intellect, humor—call it what you will—a complex/heterogeneous logic of sense to *make* 'it' known; to make 'it' happen; to *make* manifest a 'certain kind of practice-knowledge' of that which may not 'fit in' exactly or precisely (or even at all), but in spite of that (or even because of it) , may put one's body and soul at risk to make that polemical condition of life itself accessible, hearable, readable, graspable, right here, right now". (Golding, p. 103)

This courageous, risk-taking, *parrhesiastic* knowledge-practice might no longer go by the name queer theory. Instead, as William Haver, whose work Golding is riffing off, suggests, we might call it "the New Pornography": "fragmentary, anonymous, perverse, always in flight from the rigor mortis ... and the flat line of gay and lesbian or queer studies" this might be the "instauration (at once renewal and founding: the reiteration) of the New Pornography... The work of the New Porn is at

once immemorially archaic, always yet to come, and yet nothing other than the impossibility (for knowledge) of: here, now, this" (Haver, 2002, p. xi).

Everything you wanted to know about sex (but queer theory forgot to tell you)

Robyn Wiegman tells it like it is in her conclusion to *Object Lessons* where she traces the slide within queer theory from sex to gender. She writes, "if Queer Studies now seems enthralled by gender, what might we say about the sex queer theory once sought so defiantly to have? Did its bold declaration for critical monogamy undermine its desire from the outset, igniting passion for the very thing (gender) that its commitment to sexuality categorically refused? Or should we craft a psychic account of the historical situation, one that traces how the investment in sex as analytic aim was so profoundly embedded in counterhegemonic rage against the homophobic nationalism of dominant responses to AIDS that there was no way *not* to become exhausted by it?" (Wiegman, 2012, pp. 338-339). Wiegman is surely right that sex and sexuality proved so central to queer theory in its earliest formations because of AIDS but that anger, rage and defiance is now largely forgotten, not quite repressed, but still a dim and distant concern for current queer theorizing. Wiegman goes on to wonder if "under the influence of the vertigo that has led us here, we might consider the possibility that queer theory's theoretical project to attend to sex was undone by the very political ambition that emerged to characterize it—that is, by the priority accorded to the critique of heteronormativity, which has made antinormativity, as I discuss above, the primary political gesture of the field" (Wiegman, pp. 339). Wiegman's is a cogent diagnosis and this is because, yes, in the shift of attachment from sexuality to gender we have seen sex drop out of the frames of analysis³. And in this slippage we have witnessed a move from the critique of heteronormativity to a desire for normativity (what has been called by Lisa Duggan among others *homonormativity*). Wiegman argues that it is precisely the problem of antinormativity which has pushed sex and the obscene off scene⁴. Wiegman asks: "Let's consider the paradox I am tracking here another way. Imagine attending with critical rigor to sex itself—to embodied acts, erotic forms, fantasies, affects, identifications, and cultural organizations of bodies and desire—while trying to ensure that our investigation takes political aim against normativity. Fist-fucking, BDSM, polyamory, sex with friends, erotic vomiting, stone femininity. What kind of critical attention can avoid the slide into analytic normativity?"⁵ (Wiegman, pp. 340). Her less than sanguine answer is that this theoretical slide is impossible because any critical attention to sex acts which lie outside the heteronormative can only reiterate and buttress the discursive and ideological position of the

heteronormative insofar as those acts which are considered perverse (which may indeed have had their own normative and ideological scripts) are considered so as a consequence of the presiding ideologies of heteronormativity: "Each resistant act is bound to its reigning definition; indeed there is no resistance without first establishing heteronormative definitions" (Wiegman, p. 341).

Wiegman's diagnoses may leave us less than hopeful. But there is something promising to be found in her final set of reflections. "At the heart of the antinormative enterprise, then, is a deceptively simple but as yet unanswered, perhaps, unanswerable, question: What is the sex that queers so queerly have? Or more pertinently, what is the queer sex that queers so nonnormatively have? And *how* will we know it when we see it? These questions are impossible to answer, in part because antinormativity is finally not about the object of study per se but about the relation of aspiration that discerns, prioritizes, and, yes, disciplines, it. For this reason, it seems possible to say that sex—by which I mean the specificity of acts, the diversity of identifications, the (de)materialization of desire, and the imbrications of soma, psyche, and sociality—is a rather queer object of study, even for the field that has come to claim and represent it" (Wiegman, pp. 341-342). The very premise of this issue on "Bodily Fluids" is the need to think sex in all of these ways which Wiegman has found it to be unthinkable as an object for queer studies. Again, it is worth recalling that for Berlant and Edelman it is the very contradictoriness of sex which makes it unbearable but that nevertheless we must bear (with) it. And in attending to sex, bodily fluids and the imbrications of acts, identifications, de-materializations of desire and the enmeshments of soma, psyche and sociality, the authors here are arguing for a critically *non-monogamous* queer theory, one as attached to gender as it is to sex as it is to sexuality. Another Bersanian Molotov cocktail of an opening line is instructive here: "psychoanalytically speaking, monogamy is cognitively inconceivable and morally indefensible" (Bersani, 1998, p. 3). Wiegman goes on to ruminate if this means "that queer critique has never quite had the sex it so famously is thought to have had? To say yes to all these suppositions makes it possible to think this: that under the tutelage of its project of antinormativity, queer critique has been animated less by sex than by its *proximity* to sex, a proximity that has proliferated objects, transformed identifications, and elaborated all kinds of analytic capacities not in spite of but because of the way that the field has been variously fascinated, unnerved, haunted, bored, overdetermined, or indifferent to sex, but never finally committed to it as its primary object of analysis, no matter how often it has tried" (Wiegman, p. 342).

The same could be said of queer theory's relations to bodily fluids, that it has been animated more by its *proximity* to fluids rather than treating them as objects of enquiry in their own right. This issue takes up the fluids expelled, excorporated, ejected by queer theory as its primary objects of analysis. In focusing on fluids queer theory can give up on what it most wants (identity) in order to have what it thinks it wants (sex) but has not had up to now. There are no proper objects of queer inquiry, only improper ones. And in the anti-identitarian moves I am arguing for here we can bring about a more promiscuous queer studies which is not, in the end, always sutured to identity. Eve Sedgwick argues for just such a *messy*, untidy queer knowledge-practice: She says: "we need for there to be sites where the meanings don't line up tidily with each other, and we learn to invest those sites with fascination and love". We need, Sedgwick is arguing, to stay with and *in* the mess (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 3). She confesses that "becoming a perverse reader" invests a great deal in "the surplus charge of my trust in [texts] to remain powerful, refractory, and exemplary". This is for Sedgwick a rigorous "ardent reading" which is marked by love and only upon re-reading (perversely of course) her *Tendencies* did I notice that messiness is such a privileged feature of queerness for Sedgwick. Not only does she claim that "representation, identity, gender, sexuality and the body can't be made to line up *neatly* together" but (and on many readings and re-readings of "Queer and Now" I seemed to overlook this perhaps hidden piece of writing of hers) "sexuality" is also "the locus of so many showy pleasures and *untidy* identities" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 20). This lack of neatness and the unruliness and untidiness of identities, genders, sexualities leads Sedgwick to conclude that "sexuality in this sense, perhaps, can *only* mean queer sexuality" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 20).

If the secret (or truth) of queer theory is, as we have already noted, that it does not want to talk about sex, then we can go a little further and say that it is the messiness of sex which it is particularly keen to abject. Queer theory does not—despite what it tells itself—like the icky, sticky, yucky, viscous⁶, gloopy, gunky, mascara-streaked, wet, bloody, sweaty, pissy⁷, shitty, leaky, seeping, weeping, splashing, spurting, spasming, milky. It needs to carefully mop up the messy, the dirty, the sexually disgusting (Dollimore). In order to remain squeaky clean it has to cast out that which it deems too perverse.

Perversion's Seductions

Let me give a recent example of how perversely queer sex needs to get written out or screened out in order to make way for a more antiseptic scenario. The current issue of the psychoanalytically-inflected sexuality studies journal *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* includes an award-winning essay by Avgi Saketopoulou which aims to rethink perversion in anti-identitarian ways (Saketopoulou, 2014). One of the respondents to this essay is Tim Dean who applauds Saketopoulou for tackling via Jean Laplanche and Bersani the intransigence of the psychoanalytic understanding of perverse sexuality. In so doing, Dean suggests, she delinks perversion from identity politics and reveals sexuality to be "alien to selfhood: sex is not the expression of identity but its undoing" (Dean, 2014, pp. 270). This is hardly surprising coming from Dean who has consistently argued that perversion is the obscene undertow of normative (hetero)sexuality and who has always allowed bodily fluids to saturate his thinking and writing. In *Unlimited Intimacy* Dean intersperses theoretical (mostly Freudian-Lacanian) accounts of bareback sex with auto-ethnographical confessions of his own barebacking encounters, sex with strangers and the fluids they exchanged⁸. No wonder then that even *within* queer theory Dean's writing is considered to be a bit too much, a bit too perverse, too much information. This may be because, as Haver tells us, "to read the New Porn ...is to read as the stranger one becomes in pornographic invention—in other words: seriously to give oneself to the risks that art, fucking, imagination, love, and thinking are" (Haver, p. xi). And in his response to Saketopoulou Dean himself is quick to point out how easy it is for moralizing discourses to overwrite even the most positive interpretations of perverse sexuality. He says: "Once perversion is dissociated from sexuality for whatever reason, it resumes its moralizing force and reverts to a pre-Freudian meaning ...'Perversion' devoid of sex is not a psychoanalytic concept but an ineluctably normative one". In this reversion to a pre-Freudian understanding of perverse attachments Dean argues that we witness a retreat to a normativizing political, theoretical and ethical moral ground. He believes that Saketopoulou falls prey to this sanitizing danger.

But let's look at what amounts to a *double* clean-up operation on perversion here. In their introduction to the issue, Lisa Baraitser and Muriel Dimen give us their reading of Dean's reading of Saketopoulou. They say: "Dean is a provocative writer. Of sexuality, he says that 'in order to have sexuality you need a hole' but by 'hole' he means not only bodily orifices but gaps in knowledge and intimacy. And, not a clinician [this seems telling and an instance of moralizing in devaluing what a psychoanalytic critic who does not work clinically has to say. They are no doubt uneasy

about a line like "going to see an analyst is like getting sling-fucked by a filthy stranger" coming from a non-clinician (Dean, 2014, pp. 275)], still he dares to liken treatment to sex: 'Just as the transformative work of analysis entails stepping away from ... psychic comfort zone[s]', so diving into sexuality involves taking great, if also worthy, psychic risks. Indeed, he wonders whether Saketopoulou is herself pulled toward the safety of the normative. At a certain point, 'a veil of respectability descends to obscure crucial details' when Saketopoulou describes her patient as having 'had sex with the abject stranger'. Dean wonders whether this familiar euphemism manifests 'a residuum of shame or the return of repression' (Baraitser and Dimen, 2014, pp. 252-253). But a second veil of respectability in this very introduction obscures crucial details and manifests a *second* residuum of shame and return of repression.

Let us look at what it is exactly that Dean says: "The stranger who approaches our man in the sling may be physically repulsive but he is also endowed with an intangible quality—something enigmatic—that makes him desirable. At this point in the clinical narrative, however, a veil of respectability descends to obscure crucial details of the encounter. 'My patient' Saketopoulou writes, 'had sex with this abject stranger'. The phrase *had sex*, covering a multitude of possibilities, begs the question. Here *had sex* is a euphemism, possibly signalling a residuum of shame or the return of repression. This reader wants to know what kind of sex: did the stranger suck or rim or fist Adam or simply fuck him? Did he wear a condom or ejaculate inside? Did he cum or disappear without doing so. The intensity of Adam's experience raises the possibility that 'the abject stranger' fucked him bareback" (Dean, 2014, pp. 274-275). The questions Dean poses about the possible sex acts and fluids ejaculated are not "negligible" ones but Saketopoulou and Baraitser and Dimen cover over them leaving "holes" in the discourse of perversity.

The Holes in/of Queer Theory

The question of "holes" is a central one for any queer studies which would want to avoid the impulse to sanitize or mop up scenes of perverse sexuality. As Dean tells us it is Laplanche's concept of the "enigmatic signifier" which is crucial because it involves a penetration of the body by an enigma from the Other. It is this penetration (making a hole in the body) which is foundational for sexuality and in not privileging penetration but rather *being penetrated* Dean (via Laplanche) is suggesting that sexuality is dephallicized. In this psychoanalytic account "orifices

formed from the invagination of the cutaneous surface are what count, not the phallus or its correlates" (Dean, 2014, pp. 273). In deprivileging the phallus Dean is metonymizing the body as a cutaneous surface with so many penetrable holes for the emission or sucking up of eroticized fluids (by extension we might say that a demonolithization of queer theory opens up its surfaces to many holes or gaps in knowledge). "Another way of putting it would be to say that in order to have sexuality you need a hole—prototypically a mouth for sucking (or an anus or a vagina, each of which performs its own version of sensual sucking). However, sucking represents a way of converting the passive position of being penetrated into an active position, or possibly a way of equivocating the distinction between active and passive. Sexual acts are themselves partial translations of the enigma. We should say, rather, that in order to have sexuality you need a hole in knowledge—a positive enigma—that creates a desiring hole in corporeality" (dean, 2014, p. 273). This openness to being penetrated by the other which founds sexuality as relational is, as Bersani and Dean acknowledge, potentially self-shattering. But it is in this self-shattering that new relational modes, *parrhesiastic* modes of connectedness to others and the world, are instantiated (Bersani, 2015). It is in this ineluctable relationality that we are opened up to others and tidying up these scenes of messy *jouissance*, making sex safe, can only lead to an unethicity in and of queer theory.

What Does Queer Theory Teach us about Se(x)?

Dean is right to suggest that "psychoanalysts, no more than the rest of us, are closer to perverse sexuality—to its abjection, its unjustifiable filth, and its strange pleasures—than a respectable profession would like to imagine"⁹ (Dean, "Uses of Perversity", 276). What I am arguing, and the contributors to this special issue are too, is that queer theorists are close to (remember Wiegman's argument about proximity) perverse sexuality but we need to get closer and exude in the sex and fluids which a hygienicized and domesticated queer theory would like to abject as its unjustifiably filthy remainders rather than its strangest pleasures. At the close of their prescient and wonderful essay "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?" Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner write that "of course, we have deferred asking the crucial question: what does queer theory teach us about sex?" (Berlant and Warner, 1995, pp. 349) As we have already heard from Wiegman this question has been deferred time and again by queer theorists but the very unanswerability (or impossibility)

of this question harbours its promise for queer studies, if we are prepared to stay with the mess and are courageous enough to risk telling it as it is.

Let us look at a later essay by Berlant and Warner where aversion, perversion and bodily fluids play feature roles. At the end of "Sex in Public" they admit that "the project of thinking about sex in public does not only engage sex when it is disavowed or suppressed. Even if *sex practice is not the object domain*, sex is everywhere present" (Berlant and Warner, 1998, pp. 564, my emphasis). Why, we might ask, is sex practice *not* the object domain of queer studies? And why is it left until the final line of their *PMLA* essay on what queer theory can teach us? And why, again, is it left until the final pages of an essay on sex in public? Where, they themselves ask, "is the tweaking, thwacking, thumping, sliming, and rubbing you might have expected—or dreaded—in a paper on sex"? (Berlant and Warner, 1998, pp. 564). They then go on to describe two sexual scenes which bring up many of the tensions we have been talking about. It is the second scene—one of erotic vomiting—which particularly interests me here. They describe their wanderings:

Later, the question of aversion and perversion came up again. This time we were in a bar that on most nights is a garden-variety leather bar, but that, on Wednesday nights, hosts a sex performance event called 'Pork'. Shows typically include spanking, flagellation, shaving, branding, laceration, bondage, humiliation, wrestling—you know, the usual [but you won't find much queer theorizing about any of these practices, however *usual* they may be]: amateur, everyday practitioners strutting for everyone else's gratification, not unlike an academic conference. This night, word was circulating that the performance was to be erotic vomiting. This sounded like an appetite spoiler, and *the thought of leaving early occurred to us* but was overcome by a simple curiosity: what would the foreplay be like? Let's stay until it gets messy. Then we can leave" (Berlant and Warner, 1998, pp. 564, my emphases).

As with Saketopoulou's patient who "had sex with the abject stranger" the rumor of "erotic vomiting" excites Berlant and Warner's curiosity (remember Golding's *parrhesia*) but not without initial aversion and a cautiousness about how messy things might get¹⁰. In Laplanchean terms they are initially reluctant to be penetrated by the implantation of the enigmatic signifier from the other, have reservations about the intermixture of pleasure and palpable sexual disgust (an "appetite

spoiler"). But their story goes on to allegorize an ethical openness to the enigma of the Other which queer theory can learn a valuable lesson from:

A boy, twentyish, very skateboard, comes on the low stage at one end of the bar, wearing lycra shorts and a dog collar. He sits loosely in a restraining chair. His partner comes out and tilts the bottom's head up to the ceiling, stretching out his throat. Behind them is an array of foods. The top begins pouring milk down the boy's throat, then food, then more milk. It spills over, down his chest and onto the floor. A dynamic is established between them in which they carefully keep at the threshold of gagging. The bottom struggles to keep taking in more than he really can. The top is careful to give him just enough to stretch his capacities. From time to time a baby bottle is offered as a respite, but soon the rhythm intensifies. The boy's stomach is beginning to rise and pulse.

It is at this point that we realize we cannot leave, cannot even look away. No one can. The crowd is transfixed by the scene of intimacy and display, control and abandon, ferocity and abjection. People are moaning softly with admiration, then whistling, stomping, screaming encouragements. They have pressed forward in a compact and intimate group. Finally, as the top inserts two, then three fingers in the bottom's throat, insistently offering his own stomach for the repeated climaxes, we realize that we have never seen such a display of trust and violation. We are breathless. (Berlant and Warner, 1998, pp. 565)

Freud claims in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that "everything relating to the problem of pleasure and unpleasure touches upon one of the sorest spots of present-day psychology" (Freud, 1953, pp. 209). The curiously unpleasurable yet intensely erotic pleasure of the scene Berlant and Warner describe above is a sore spot for contemporary queer thinking which would prefer to have left early and not waited for the reflexifying, the fluids, and the intimate, breathless relationality. In staying with the mess, in remaining with unpleasure, Berlant and Warner as queer theorists are able to share in the top and bottom's sensual and sexual excitations and their destructuring and disorganizing of the soma, psyche and sociality. In coming undone in the face of the Other, Berlant and Warner's own erotic pleasures are self-shattering in a way which does not close off relationality but rather opens it up. Bodily and psychic shattering, here in a scene of erotic vomiting, facilitates a moment in intense bodily penetration (by the enigmatic signifier) and

opening up of psychic (and physical space as bodies come together). Perverse sexuality in all its filthiness is what allows for this psychic and somatic openness and transformative potential; it sketches blueprints for modes of access to new forms of relationality, styles of existence and generous openness to the unimaginable future to-come.

Among these various zones, the ones that distinguish and assert themselves are those that are sites of effusion, a spurt, a flowing of humor, liquor, that is a solution/dissolution of form in which an incessantly new possibility of form is sketched.

Everything is there, in the sketch of an indeterminate recomposition out of which another body would spring, another sharing of bodies, another mingling and unmingling of skins, a *liquidation* of organic and social contours and constructions.

In sex, bodies testify to a vocation for infinitizing oneself beyond all secondary determinations of a given order. This is why sex is the place of creation: of making children or forming forms, assemblages and configurations, rhythms and resonances. Starting from nothing, that is, opening wide what is already itself only opening: mouth, eye, ear, nostril, sex, anus, skin, skin indefinitely reclaimed and all its pores reopened. Spacings, generosities, captures and abandonments, comings and goings, swings: always the syncopated cadence of a gait that carries towards the confines of what is delimited, by the body first of all.

The body of pleasure (and its reverse, the body of pain) illimits the body. It is its transcendence. (Nancy, 2013, pp. 96)

Notes

¹ In an interview with Nicholas Royle, Leo Bersani ruminates on the effects of this line (and other memorable first sentences of his): "in that essay what I say about various kinds of terror of gay sex and the attitude toward pornography—and near the end of the essay, the celebration of an ascetic *jouissance*—is all connected, I suppose, to that aversion. I feel the first sentence is extremely important in almost getting a high, or at least I hope that it gives a kind of high—it gives me a high and I hope it gives the reader a high" (Royle and Bersani, 1998, p. 180).

- ² For a brilliant reading of how sex or the orgasmic force ("*potentia gaudendi*") has become technopolitically captured and managed in what she calls the "pharmacopornographic era" see Beatriz Preciado's *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. Preciado also has a lot to say about endocrinal fluids and many other fluids, not least the testosterone gel she doses herself with every day.
- ³ This is the opposite of the shift Gayle Rubin called for in "Thinking Sex" which famously opens with the line: "The time has come to think about sex". See Rubin "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality", p. 137.
- ⁴ See Cara Judea Alhadeff's *Viscous Expectations: Justice, Vulnerability, the Ob-scene*.
- ⁵ Two recent exceptions (both of which, coincidentally, devote chapters to fist-fucking) to the critical inattention to sex are Annamarie Jagose's *Orgasmology* and Lynne Huffer, *Are The Lips A Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*.
- ⁶ On the stickiness, viscosity and yuckiness of various fluids see Lisa Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* and Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, esp. pp. 95-136.
- ⁷ On cum, blood, urine and especially female ejaculate see Shannon Bell's *Fast Feminism*. For considerations of milk, blood, semen, urine and other fluids issuing from the liquescent body of Christ in metaphysical poetry see Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* and "Sacred Subjects and the Aversive Metaphysical Conceit: Crashaw, Serrano, Ofili".
- ⁸ Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*. See also Dean, "The Biopolitics of Pleasure."
- ⁹ For a "downright shitty" reading of Lacan as abjection's biggest ally see Calvin Thomas' *Masculinity, Psychoanalysis, Straight Queer Theor*. His earlier *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* is excellent on semen, piss and diarrhea. For another reading of male bodily fluids in the context of performance art see Fintan Walsh, *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis*.
- ¹⁰ For another scene of eroticized vomiting see Nikki Sullivan's reading of The Prodigy's video for "Smack my Bitch Up" in "Smacking My Bitch Up: Queer or What?" Giffney and O'Rourke, eds. *The Ashgate Companion to Queer Theory*. The Prodigy's current single "Nasty Nasty" should be considered the sound track to this issue of *InterAlia*.

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Tears of Reign: Big Sovereigns Do Cry

Kathleen Biddick

Hamm: What's he [Nagg] doing?

Clove: He's crying

Hamm: Then he's living¹

Contemporary theorists of sovereignty and biopolitics might learn from the popular culture of zombies and its performance of the living and the living dead.² Zombie fictions are creatively re-animating dead zones of sovereignty imagined by theorists as “bare life” (Giorgio Agamben) or the undead “flesh” of the sovereign (Santner 2011)³ Zombies are transubstantiating quickly: from the zombie apocalypse of *Zombieland* (Columbia Pictures 2009) with its Grail quest for the last Twinkie, to the now miraculous re-animation of the living dead—the subject of the novel *Warm Bodies* (2012) by Isaac Marion, now released as a film (Summit Entertainment 2013). Imagined as a remake of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Warm Bodies* stages a love-story between the living and the living dead and in so doing questions the sovereign construction of the borders between friend (the living) and enemy (the living dead). Zombies and humans of *Warm Bodies* slowly re-learn language and re-enter a world of tears (such tears will become the medium of the argument that follows). Over the past fifty-years, theorists of sovereignty have spun—as feverishly as their counterparts in comics, film, TV—science-fictions of the living and the living dead. The classic study of premodern sovereignty: *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1957) by Ernst Kantorowicz founds the narrative. He traced how pre-modern jurists came to imagine the sovereign as a creature with two bodies, one living and temporal, one eternally undead. Subsequent sovereign science fictions spun from Kantorowicz—by Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Eric Santner, to name a few authors—matter because they try to draw the line between the living and the living dead as a *temporal* marker: once upon a time there was the sovereign power to make die and let live (clean cuts between the living and the dead) and then came modern biopolitics, the power to make live and let die (the impasse of the living

and the living dead).⁴ Consider a recent installment of such sovereign science fictions, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (2011). Drawing upon Kantorowicz's narrative of the king's two bodies, Eric Santner represents modernity as sovereignty's apocalyptic zombieland. The modern citizen-subject, according to his argument, is seized by a fantastic excess of alien flesh—the undead residue of the failed transference, at the time of the French Revolution, of the medieval sovereign's second body (the immortal one) into the modern body politic of the People. This paper argues that these processes of transference and periodization in contemporary theory need to be understood as sovereign border technologies. Kantorowicz drew the hard line when he presented the king's two bodies as a product of the secularizing (read also, modernizing) *transference* of the corporate sacramental body of the Catholic Church (*corpus mysticum*) into the corporate notion of juridical royal embodiment. Kantorowicz intimates that this “transfer” was what psychoanalysts would call today “transference” in that Tudor jurists fabricating the juridical fantasy of royal zombie embodiment, did so, “unconsciously rather than consciously” (19). Kantorowicz thus positioned himself fantastically as the “one who knows” classic sovereignty; scholars have been transferring to his text ever since.⁵ What this institutional transference has foreclosed, I argue, is the queer imbrication of classical sovereignty (to let die) and biopolitics (to make live) — the living and the living dead.⁶ Such temporal foreclosure results, I argue, in the *fetish of modernity* among the disciples of Kantorowicz. Their tracts profess their faith in biopolitics as the sign of modernity; at the very same time they must painfully disavow the disturbing evidence for untimely traumatic entanglements of classical sovereignty and biopolitics. This impasse is not much fun, as Tim Dean has pointed out in his recent essay on the “Biopolitics of Pleasure.”⁷ This essay asks, then, how to rethink the living and the living dead, the theoretical impasse of political theology and biopolitics, such that critique is not dismissed as “mere” historicism or, alternatively, as a misguided effort to separate out symbolic fiction from fantasy?⁸ How then to argue for what I perceive as the queer untimeliness of the living and the living dead, the untimeliness of political theology and biopolitics?

An Archive of Tears

Kantorowicz opened his study of the king's two bodies with his now famous reading of William Shakespeare's tragedy, *King Richard II*. He concentrated exclusively on the famous deposition scene

(Act IV) in which Richard, stripped of his regalia, calls for a mirror and shatters it upon glimpsing his reflection. According to Kantorowicz, Shakespeare's tragedy eternalized the metaphor of the king's two bodies. Subsequent theorists (notably Santner) also truncate their readings of the play at the mirror scene and argue along similar lines. But why do Kantorowicz and Santner exit the play at Act IV? There is more, I argue, to Shakespeare's performance of sovereignty in *King Richard II*.⁹ By the end of the play (the sixth scene of Act V), Shakespeare has transformed Richard into a human crying machine.

Ha; ha; keep time! how sour sweet music is,
When time is broke and no proportion kept.
So is it in the music of men's lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disorder'd string;
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
I wasted time, and now doth time waste me,
For now hath time made me his numb'ring clock.
My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch
Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,
Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.
Now sir, the sound that tells what hour it is
Are clamorous groans that strike upon my heart,
Which is the bell. So sighs and tears and groans
Show minutes, hours and times. But my time
Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy,
While I stand fooling here, his Jack o' the clock.

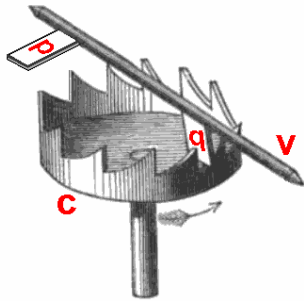
(*King Richard II*-Act V-Scene 5)

In so doing Shakespeare is staging, I argue, the temporal imbrication of classical sovereignty (to make die) and biopolitics (to make live). Richard's tears enable us to engage the question: how might an excess of tears breach the sovereign borders drawn (as we have seen) by transference and periodization of contemporary theorists?¹⁰ *King Richard II* offers me an archive of tears with which to explore how historians might see through sovereign scenes and see *through* them.¹¹ Try this in your home archive. First, blind yourself with tears: "Deep down, deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep. For at the very moment they veil sight, tears would unveil what is proper to the eye."¹² Archival tears offer a way into a biohistory of sovereignty, because they fold intra-inter-corporeality, meaning tears are inside and outside at the same time. Tears stage scenes of fleshly encounter.¹³ But please be advised, my archive of tears is not, however, intended to produce a history of tears. Scholars such as Elina Gertsman, Marjory E. Lange, Kimberly Christine Patton, Tom Lutz, Peter Schwenger (to name just a few) have ably traced such genealogies.¹⁴ Nor am I trying to write a history of religious compunction and its gift of tears, since we already have good studies of such phenomena in the work of the medievalist, Sandra J. McEntire, and also in Gary Kuchar's investigation of Catholic recusant poetry of religious sorrow in early modern England, a literature of sighs and tears.¹⁵ Instead, I am asking how tears might be a media that queers the fantasy of sovereign decision and the naming of the enemy (the basic ingredients of sovereignty according to Carl Schmitt)?¹⁶

***So sighs and tears and groans/ Show minutes, hours and times* (Act 5 Scene 5)**

When it comes to *King Richard II*, critical readings, as I have already noted, crescendo with the scene of the shattered mirror in Act IV. More recently, scholars have begun to claim, contra Kantorowicz, that Shakespeare was not eternalizing the metaphor of the king's two bodies in *Richard II*, but rather that he was desacramentalizing it.¹⁷ They argue that Shakespeare was intent on removing the corporate concept of the king's two bodies from any pretensions to an eternal register. More specifically, Gary Kuchar has recently read *King Richard II* as Shakespeare's intentional desacramentalizing parody of contemporary Jesuit-influenced recusant literature of devotional tears. Eternalizing, desacramentalizing—these are the binaries of counter-discourses that, I argue, miss Shakespeare's powerful staging of another political scene in Act V: the transformation of Richard into a human crying machine. By Act V, Scene 5, the audience already knows that assassins are on their way to Richard's

prison cell. Meanwhile, Richard ticks away. He recounts to the audience how his heavy groans have become the mechanical gears that strike his heart which now peals the hourly chime. He observes how his hands mark each minute as they metronomically wipe the tears from his clock-face. In fabricating this human crying machine, Shakespeare mobilizes a mechanical metaphor in order to point to what he imagines as the “escapement” of sovereignty.



The Verge Escapement of mechanical clock c=crown wheel; v=verge; p and q are the pennon like gears

MECHANICS OF THE OSCILLATING GEAR CLOCK -16th century



The royal mechanical clock at the Tudor Palace of Hampton Court c. 1540, constructed by the royal clock maker

In Elizabethan clock talk (of which geeky Shakespeare was enamored) the escapement is a generic term used to describe the mechanisms that transfer energy to an oscillating lever that produces the stepped increments registered on minute and hour hands of the clock. For Elizabethans the escapement consisted of a crown wheel (a gear shaped like a crown) driven by a weight and checked by pennon-like gears mounted on a vertical shaft, known as a verge. The verge would eventually be refined into a lever called a deadbeat. By turning the king into a human clock Shakespeare is staging sovereignty, likewise, as an oscillating lever, a verge, a deadbeat. In Act V Shakespeare uses Richard's tears as the lever. This lever oscillates discontinuously between the mortal body of the king and the imagined eternal corporate body of sovereignty. When we read this scene, we begin to wonder why

Shakespeare devoted so much time to imagining sovereignty as a toggle, and also, why Kantorowicz read past this uncanny image of Richard as a weeping clock.

My method for exploring this conundrum is to *juxtapose* Shakespeare's staging of a sovereign time-bomb in Act V with the better known scene of the shattered mirror (Act IV), so beloved by Kantorowicz. Just before Richard calls for the mirror in Act IV, he cries out to the audience that he is blinded by his tears. These blinding tears offer up to him a kind of x-ray vision-- he suddenly announces that he now is able to see himself surrounded by a pack of traitors. Hounded by this pack, Richard proceeds to gaze into the mirror and then to shatter it. I am going to pause here and ask readers to do something that might seem strange. I am asking them to pick up the pieces of this broken glass, because I think Shakespeare is using these splinters deliberately to recall images of the heated late medieval debate over the orthodoxy (or not) of the Real Presence (the transubstantiation of bread and wine into Christ's flesh and blood) in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The orthodox guarantee of the Real Presence in the Eucharist was closely bound, indeed pinned, by polemicists (as I shall unfold below) to the embodiment of the sovereign. Orthodox versions of the Real Presence and sovereignty were closely bound. By the later medieval period, theological debates over the doctrine of the Real Presence of the Eucharist revolved around optics. Heather Phillips and other scholars have noted how optics and mathematics had deeply permeated theological speculation by the fourteenth century.¹⁸ Shakespeare's much noted fascination with optics and the special effects he conjures in *Richard II*, need to be understood not only technically but, I argue, also theologically. A school of late medieval university scholars, conversant in optics and mathematics, rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation based on their scientific studies. John Wycliffe (1320-1384, Oxford University), for example, used the science of optics throughout his treatise, *De Eucharistia* (1380), in order to deny the orthodoxy of transubstantiation of the Real Presence by opening up the gap between *nudum sacramentum* (that is the bare bread and wine of the sacrament of the Eucharist) and *res sacramenta*, the virtual presence of Christ in the sacrament. Wycliffe reasoned as follows: "The body of Christ is more clear and resplendent than the sun... and at every point of the host there is the figure, *Mukephi* (a word he drew from Muslim optical treatises--the Arab work mukāfi', is the word for a parabola or parabolic section)." He thus imagined the host as an optical device composed of myriad paraboloid

mirrors which focused the divine body of Christ like a burning mirror. Wycliffe used optics to refuse the binary logic of the doctrine of the real presence and called that logic a form of idolatry. In the mirror scene of *King Richard II*, it is as if the politics of sovereignty and Eucharistic optics become mirror images of each other. Richard, recall, had seen through his tears in Act 4 to perceive the traitors surrounding him.¹⁹ And indeed, Shakespeare's play is first and foremost a play about treason. The word treason and its variants (treason, traitor, and treachery) occur most frequently in *King Richard II* compared to any of his other plays. This hinging of treason with resonant images of Eucharistic optics in Act 4 seems crucial to me for an understanding of what Shakespeare is trying to do in the play regarding political theology. At this juncture, Kantorowicz's reading seems particularly unhelpful. In a book of over 500 pages in length, treason is a subject inexplicably absent from his discussion of sovereignty. He mentions treason a total of only six times. Even when discussing the play of *Richard II*, he merely alludes to treason, without any analysis. When he comes to his final doxological chapter devoted to Dante, whom he praised as the singular humanistic embodiment of sovereignty (self-crowned crown and self-mitred—a kind of anamorphic image of Richard II), Kantorowicz keeps his silence regarding the stunning and leaky corporeality of treason lodged at the very heart of the *Commedia*.²⁰ Readers of the *Inferno* will recall that at the zero-point of the *Inferno*, in the neighborhood (or ghetto) he dubbed *Judecca*, Dante encounters Satan half-trapped in the frozen lake of his tears (lesser traitors are fully frozen in the lake "like straw in glass" (*Inferno* XXXIV, (la dove l'ombre tutte era coperte/e trasparen come festuca in vetro", ll. 11-12). The emperor of the *Inferno* (lo 'imperator del doloroso regno" l. 28), is eternally condemned to gnawing on the traitors of Caesar (Cassius and Brutus) and on Judas (the traitor of Christ), whose bodies cram the trinity of his mouths. Neither this imperial cannibal nor the bodies on which he gorges are able to speak—and for once, Dante does not ventriloquize.²¹ When Dante beholds this awful sight of infernal sovereignty incorporating treason (literally), he evokes for his readers a profound sense of what Eric Santner has called "undeadness": "It was not death, nor could one call it life/Imagine, if you have the wit/ what I became, deprived of either life." (lo non mor' e non rimasi vivo/pensa oggimai per te, s'hai fior d'ingegno/qual io divenni, d'uno e d'altro privo/ (lines 25-27).²² Amidst the flap of Satan's wings and the rain of his tears, attentive readers might also hear the rustle of documents from the treason trial (1302) of Dante and his three co-defendants, whom Florentines judged guilty and condemned to

exile.²³ Kantorowicz, I speculate, disavows treason in his study of sovereignty, because the question of treason was so biographically traumatic for him. On April 20, 1933, shortly after the Nazi Party had barred Jews from civil service (Law for the Restoration of Professional Civil Service), he, who in 1930 had been appointed to a professorship in medieval history at the University of Frankfurt, wrote decisively to the Minister of Science, Art and Education to inform him forthwith that he would be suspending his summer teaching duties.²⁴ Among the reasons he offered for this decision, was his shock that he, who had fought heroically for Germany in World War I and who had published an acclamation of a national Germany in his bestselling history, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* (1927), was being treated like a "traitor" (Landesverräter) because of his Jewish descent.²⁵ Treason would prove to be neuralgic for Kantorowicz throughout his career, but not so for his scholarly admirers. In *Discipline and Punish* (1978), Michel Foucault uncannily sutured his hectic and much celebrated opening tableaux of the execution of a regicide in Paris in 1757 with his enthusiastic (booster) endorsement of Kantorowicz's major work, *The King's Two Bodies: An Essay in Political Theology* which had been recently translated into French. Giorgio Agamben, another critical commentator on Kantorowicz's theory of the king's two bodies, argued for the twinning of the execution of a regicide with the killing of a *homo sacer*: "it does not matter from our perspective, that the killing of *homo sacer* can be considered as less than homicide, and the killing of the sovereign as more than homicide; what is essential is that in neither case does the killing of a man constitute an offense of homicide."²⁶ Agamben is arguing here for the undecidability of the sovereign and *homo sacer*. Agamben's insight enables an understanding of how Kantorowicz unwittingly articulated such undecidability in his letter of resignation (he, a hero, is being treated like traitor and because of his Jewish ancestry he is deemed *homo sacer* by the new Nazi race laws). It is precisely this catastrophic undecidability that his great study of sovereignty, *The King's Two Bodies* (1957), forecloses. Shakespeare, in contrast, searched for the lever between royal treason and bare life, the sovereign and *homo sacer*, politics and theology. He is trying to rethink the zombie franchise of the late sixteenth-century. I have already noted his exploration of such a lever when he stages Richard II as a human-clock, but he also plays with this lever in Scene 4 of Act V through his theatrical choices for staging the assassination of Richard. Rather than work with the commonly accepted Tudor account for Richard's demise by starvation, Shakespeare chose to use Holinshed's competing version of his death by assassination. Holinshed's account, as

scholars have noted, deliberately echoes the medieval narrative describing the assassination of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, by King Henry II.²⁷ The bare bones of that twelfth-century story are as follows: A king wishes his adversary dead and his henchmen take matters into their own hands and execute the deed.²⁸ In a play filled with optical illusions/allusions, the special effects of which so enamored Elizabethans, Shakespeare renders the assassination of Richard II as a kind of temporal anamorphosis.²⁹ The audience sees the death of Richard II unfold on stage, however, when heard acoustically awry, the audience hears another temporal moment, the assassination of Thomas Becket in 1170. When the reader takes up a perspective glass to view Richard's assassination, and a perspective glass is an optical device used by Elizabethans to correct, or bring into proper perspective, the anamorphic puzzles of the type posed by painters and by dramatists, such as Shakespeare, or, alternatively, if readers physically move their vantage point, as Holbein invited viewers to do in his famous anamorphic painting of *The Ambassadors*, so they could view the death's head lurking there, if the reader uses these strategies to view the assassination scene, what comes into view is a surprise. The correction of Shakespeare's temporal anamorphosis reveals none other than Lanfranc of Bec (c. 1005-1089) —abbot, jurist, scholar and court prelate, justiciar and subsequently Archbishop of Canterbury under William the Conqueror. In the shadow of the Norman conquest of England, Lanfranc wrote his famous polemic on the orthodoxy of the Real Presence.³⁰ In his famous treatise, *De corpora et sanguine Domini adversus Berengariam*, composed when he moved to the newly-founded ducal monastery at Caen in 1063, Lanfranc attacked the arguments of his contemporary Berengar, who outspokenly questioned the Real Presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist (the materialization of the flesh and blood of Christ upon the words of Eucharistic consecration). Lanfranc asserted the orthodoxy that "The Flesh is the Sacrament of the Flesh (caro, videlicet carnis...sacramentum est, Lanfranc, 56)". The high stakes of this theological controversy— its conflicts between interpretation, criticism, identity, and realism — have been well studied.³¹ What interests me from the point of view of Shakespeare's interest in treason and the Real Presence, is how Lanfranc's treatise goes beyond the stock litany of theological polemic — (Berengar as adversary of the catholic church (catholicae Ecclesiae adversario, Lanfranc, 29), sacrilegious violator of oath (sacrilegus violator, Lanfranc, 31), heretic (esse haereticus, Lanfranc, 32) — to pioneer an accusation of *treason* against him (jurare perfidiam, Lanfranc, 40). Berengar, in Lanfranc's opinion, not only challenged theological orthodoxy; he also traitorously undid

the universalism of the Catholic Church, a universalism constituted by the flesh of Christ.³² To think against this sacramental flesh is to commit treason, because, according to Lanfranc's vision, the flesh of Christ is constitutively both sacramental *and* sovereign. The flesh of the Eucharist, thus, for Lanfranc was both a sacramental and a sovereign problematic. His accusation brings into view both the sovereign body under threat of treason and also that of *homo sacer* (the one who may be killed without accusation of homicide, but who may not be sacrificed). In the gap in between the visible and the invisible, in which Berengar had meditated provocatively on the unhistorical nature of Christ's flesh, Lanfranc, instead, sutured sovereign law and in so doing paradoxically immunized universal flesh of Christ as a sovereign body politic. Thus, a biopolitics of the flesh needs to account for this "unhistorical" twining of the sacred flesh and sovereignty across the normalized divides of medieval and modern in an effort to re-conceive biopolitics of the flesh as a traumatic scene that expands and sediments as it maintains a deadly kernel, a medieval suture of flesh to sovereignty. Such a suture precludes any linear periodization of political theology and biopolitics. The suture also inverts Kantorowicz's metanarrative of political theology and sovereignty in which sacramental flesh gives way to a secularized body politic. In contrast to Kantorowicz's normalization of Shakespeare as an agent of eternalizing the king's two bodies. I have argued, instead, that the playwright stages theatrical scenes in order to expose the suture of sacramental flesh to sovereign law. The theatrical exposure does not attempt to undo sacramentality and sovereignty, but to expose their traumatic suture. But does Shakespeare stop at this stage of critique or does he go further and offer a metatheatrical critique of representation as a drive toward Real Presence, or put another way, a way of rethinking the zombie franchise of the sixteenth-century? The tears of Richard's Queen Isabella offer another archive of tears for exploring the relations between Shakespeare's critique of the sovereignty of Real Presence and his ontology of the theater. Shakespeare uses Queen Isabella to remake the widely-known medieval liturgical theater of the Easter story, known as *Quem Queritis* (Whom do you seek?). According to this Gospel story, Mary Magdalene discovers the empty Easter tomb and then encounters a gardener, the resurrected Christ, who asks her "Whom do you seek" and then admonished Mary Magdalene not to touch him (*Noli me tangere*). In his ground breaking study, entitled *This is my Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (1999), medievalist and theater-historian, Michal Kobiakka has argued that changing orthodox epistemologies of the Real Presence were constitutive of medieval forms of

representation. He tracks these changes by studying how Western Easter liturgies represented (or not) the dead body of Christ, which according to the Gospels, was absent at the empty Easter tomb. Prior to the Eucharistic crisis over the Real Presence, in the tenth- and early eleventh-centuries, no cleric ever impersonated the Risen Christ and spoke the Gospel words to Mary Magdalene. An angel-actor, clearly not Christ, would voice these words at the "stage-set" of an empty tomb. The angel addresses her tersely: *Whom do you seek?/ Jesus of Nazareth. He is not here. He has risen just as it was predicted.* By the end of the 12th century, as the Church promulgated and disciplined the doctrine of the Real Presence, Kobialka shows that the body of the resurrected Christ is represented for the first time in the Easter performance of the *Quem Queritis*. In the late twelfth-century versions, Christ now appears on stage before Mary Magdalene in the guise of gardener. He enacts the *Noli me tangere* scene recounted in Gospel of John. Such a material, theatrical embodiment of the absent, resurrected Christ transformed, according to Kobialka, the medieval representational grids of space and time. What is also chilling to realize, (and this is a link that Kobialka does not really develop), is that it is these very same *Quem Queritis* scripts of the later 12th-century that materialize the personified body of the Jewish people, who are excoriated as deicides. Take for example, the famous play book of the abbey of Fleury, which scripts the performance of the *Quem Queritis* at the turn of the twelfth-century.³³ What in the 10th century counted for a three or four spare lines, had now exploded into a script of 75 lines along with stage directions. Jews are personified at the opening of the *Quem Queritis* script: "Alas! Wretched Jewish people, Whom an abominable insanity makes frenzied. Despicable nation". As the script unfolds, the risen (theatricalized) Christ appears to Mary Magdalene and asks her the famous question recorded in the Gospel of John: "Woman, why do you weep, Whom do you seek?" At the moment of recognition, in the famous *noli me tangere* scene, Christ instructs Mary Magdalene not to touch him. Kobialka links this changing ontology of theatrical embodiment to changing doctrinal epistemologies of the Real Presence at the open of the twelfth-century. The details of the epistemological change are important. Early medieval Christians had imagined the flesh of the Eucharist as a ternary flesh intertwining the *corpus verum* (that was the historical Christ), *corpus mysticum* (that was the Eucharist) and *corpus Christi* (that was the Church). With the promulgation of the doctrine of transubstantiation the sacramental flesh was reduced to a binary. The *corpus verum* dropped out; the Universal Church came to be regarded as the *corpus mysticum*; the *corpus Christi* became the Eucharist. This chiasmic

reduction from a ternary to binary epistemology resulted in the (death) drive to represent the absent resurrected Christ theatrically and, as art historians tell us, in other media, witness, for example, the eruption of human forms in Romanesque sculpture. The monumental Romanesque building program at ducal abbey at Caen, over which Lanfranc presided from 1063-1070, just at the inauguration of the orthodoxy of the Real Presence, featured only one capital sculpted with a human form. Within one generation, as that orthodoxy became the subject of disciplinary enforcement, sculpted humanoid forms would come to populate Romanesque capitals, as well as monumental porches of those churches.³⁴ Kobialka offers a trenchant insight into these new representational modes of embodiment "Whereas in the corporeal and mystical approaches [that is, ternary], the body of Christ was silent, now the silent body was to speak the language of theological pedagogy that delimited the space of representation by consolidating the structures of belonging."³⁵ This binary sacramental flesh profoundly reorganized the temporal and spatial coordinates of medieval representation and forced a dominant gaze to organize itself around a body that is forced to materialize within theatrical space.

Fresh again, with true love's tears (*King Richard V*/1/10)

So what does Shakespeare's politics of the scene have to do with Kobialka's genealogy of changing forms of medieval representation? Kobialka imagines the Renaissance stage as the teleological endpoint of such theatrical pedagogy involved in the coerced materialization of the Real Presence in the form of an actor. I disagree with Kobialka's teleology, and I think Shakespeare would too. And now let me explain why. Shakespeare rewrote the medieval Easter *Quem Queritis* trope self-consciously in several of his plays, and, most notably in *King Richard II* in order to unpin sovereignty from the Real Presence, to re-imagine the boundaries of the living and living dead configured in the eleventh century. In Act III, scene 4, *Richard II*, Shakespeare opens his re-staging of the *Quem Queritis* trope.³⁶ Richard's queen, Isabella, still uninformed of her husband's recent capture by his usurper, Bolingbroke, but fearing the worst, seeks respite in a garden accompanied by her attendants. Shakespeare sets the stage reminiscent of the medieval horotolanus scene of the *Quem Queritis* in which Mary Magdalene and the two other Mary's hasten to the tomb before which the apostles John and Peter puzzle over the absence of Christ's body and the presence of the discarded shroud. Mary then encounters a gardener who reveals himself to her as the resurrected Christ. In Shakespeare's scene the tidings of the gardener

to Isabella (staged as a kind of Mary Magdalene) are not about resurrection. *Instead, the gardener informs the queen of a kind of anti-transfiguration* in which Richard is described as “depressed he is already/ and disposed ‘tis doubt he will be” (Act III.4. 68/69). The scene closes with the gardener’s promise to plant a memorial bush of rue on the spot where the tears of the weeping queen fell. In this pseudo- *Quem queritis* scene, Shakespeare thus imagines the tears of Magdalene/Isabella not as redemptive, but as memorial, and in so doing, he inters, but not disrespectfully, important representational strands of twelfth-century versions of the *Quem Queritis* trope that had constituted themselves, as I have already noted, around the materialization of the absent body. Shakespeare is rewriting the garden scene. But, are his moves those of desacralization as Gary Kuchar has argued in his own intriguing reading of these *Quem Queritis* stagings in *Richard II*? To ponder this question, let us see how Shakespeare further pursues staging the *Quem Queritis* scene in Act V, Scene 1. By this moment in the play, Richard has already deposed himself and is about to wend his way through the streets of London to the Tower. His queen and her attendants await him along the parade route. Isabella is now cast as Mary Magdalene on the verge of encountering the resurrected Christ. She wishes, on catching sight of him, that she, like the Magdalene, could wash Richard “fresh again with true love tears” (Act V/1/10) as Mary Magdalene has once washed the feet of Christ with her tears. But Shakespeare’s staging of their encounter inverts, once again, aspects of the medieval *Quem Queritis* script. Isabella sees in Richard not a resurrected body, as Mary Magdalene did in the Gospel stories, but, instead, a zombie: “Thou map of honour, thou King Richard’s tomb” (5/1/12). Richard turns to Isabella and speaks the word of Christ addressed to the Magdalene on Easter morning: *Noli flere* (do not weep): “Join not with grief, fair woman (Act V.1.16)”. Shakespeare then crosses out the subsequent scene of *Noli me tangere*, although it is a scene that he did know well and staged in *All’s Well that Ends Well*. Importantly, in *Richard II*, Shakespeare does not defer the touch refused by the Gospel *Noli me tangere*; instead, he has Richard and Isabella kiss before their final separation. Their substitution of a kiss for the refusal of touch (*Noli me tangere*) has been read as a parodic sign of desacralization on Shakespeare’s part. But, I ask, do we mis-recognize this kiss as a touch? Does this kiss touch upon something different? Richard speaks: “One kiss shall stop our mouths, and dumbly part” (5/1/95). Shakespeare takes this image, “stop our mouths” from the New Testament, namely, Paul’s Epistle to Titus (1.11), where Paul rails against what he called the “circumcision party” in Corinth and uses an

imperative Greek form of the verb, *epistomizo*, meaning to stop the mouth. It is the word used in Greek to put the bit in the horse's mouth, to insert the mouthpiece on the flute. Shakespeare uses the phrase several times in his plays with menacing connotations. Thus, though Richard and Isabella do touch, indeed, kiss each other on the mouth, it is kiss of violence, a silencing, a touch that is not a touch—a touch that produces untouchability. I think Shakespeare is doing two things here. First, I think he is deliberately unstaging the risen Christ in this scene in order to open up the third term of the *Quem Quaeritis* and that term was the absent, silent body of the resurrected Christ. The unspoken words of the *Noli me Tangere* in Act V, scene 1 honor the silent body of the absent Christ without forcing that body "to speak the language of theological pedagogy that delimited the space of representation by consolidating the structures of belonging." By staging a touch that does not touch, the kiss as a form of torture, that stops the mouth, Shakespeare, I think is not desacralizing nor resacralizing, but he is asking us all to reconsider a post-Real Presence in which the living dead do not underwrite the living. Just as in *Warm Bodies*, and its staging of a love between the living and the living dead, Shakespeare asks us to think again what is touch, what is absent silence, what is the Real Presence, then and now. How can we imagine a quickening of the dead zones of contemporary citizenship? The dramatist not only re-poses the Gospel question: Whom do you seek? He asks, too, who decides? To weep or not to weep, the living and the living dead?

Notes

¹ The play, *Endgame*, by Samuel Beckett was first performed April 3, 1957, one month after Ernst Kantorowicz published his classic *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). It is useful to hold the two texts together. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame: A Play in One Act* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958); accessible (November 12, 2012): <http://samuel-beckett.net/endgame.html>.

² Modeled on Donna Haraway's famous Cyborg Manifesto see, Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Non-Human Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism", *Boundary 2*, 35 (2008), pp. 85-108. Deborah Christie and Sara Juliet Laura, eds. *Better off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

- ³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 104; Eric L. Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- ⁴ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*. This essay engages in debates raised by the recent publications by Eric L. Santner and Graham Hammill which revisit in contrasting ways the question of political theology: Eric L. Santner, *The Royal Remains*; Graham Hammill, *The Mosaic Constitution: Political Theology and Imagination from Machiavelli to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Hammill's study offers a persuasive critique of the corporeal literalization of the metaphor of the king's two bodies. Likewise Jacques Lezra rethinks the politico-philosophic conditions of present democracy by questioning the incarnations of the king's two bodies: *Wild Materialism: The Ethic of Terror and the Modern Republic* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010). Also my critique of sovereignty and messianic thinking: "Dead Neighbor Archives: Jews, Muslims and The Enemy's Two Bodies" in *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, ed. Julia Reinhard Lupton and Graham Hammill (University of Chicago Press, 2012): pp. 124-142. These studies engage the so-called classics of political theology: Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. of *Politisches Theologie* (1922) by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. By John Osborne (London, 1977), Samuel Weber, "Taking Exception to Decision: Theatrical-Theological Politics. Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt," in *Walter Benjamin 1892-1940 zum 100. Geburtstag*, ed by Uwe Steiner (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 123-138, Giorgio Agabmen, *Homo Sacer*; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House ,1978), 145; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-76*, ed. by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. by David Macey (New York, 2003), pp. 239-263 and also his *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*, trans. By Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977). Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, translated by Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- ⁵ For a study of Kantorowicz sensitive to these issues of institutional transference see Alain Boureau, *Kantorowicz: Stories of a Historian*, translated by Stephen G. Nichols and Gabrielle M. Spiegel (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). Kathleen Davis points to the traumatic medievalisms of sovereignty. For insight into this uncanny persistence of sovereignty in these purported acts of deconstruction see her *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For a review see <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/6531> (accessed November 5, 2012)
- ⁶ Staked out in discursive terms: Kathleen Biddick, "Unbinding the Flesh in the Time that Remains: Crusader Martyrdom, Then and Now," *GLQ* 13 (2007): pp. 197-225 and Biddick, "Dead Neighbor Archive".

⁷ Tim Dean, "The Biopolitics of Pleasure," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 111 (Summer 2012): 477-495.

⁸ The periodization of sovereignty has unfortunately closed down lively ways of re-imagining Lacanian psychoanalysis and temporality. For inspiration in this creative effort see the reconfigurative work of the Lacanian psychoanalyst and artist, Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Maxtrixial Boderspace* (with a Foreward by Judith Butler) (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 167. Her revisions of Lacanian psychoanalysis can productively open the boundaries between creaturely life and animal life defended by Eric L. Santner (see footnote 1). I also have in mind the rich critique of temporalities engaged by queer theorists: Carolyn Dinshaw, "Touching on the Past," in *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, ed. Mathew Kuefler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 57-73; Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Biddick, "Unbinding the Flesh"; Michael Uebel, "Opening Time: Psychoanalysis and Medieval Culture," in *Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages*, edited by Eileen A. Joy, Myra J. Seaman, Kimberley K. Bell and Mary K. Ramsey (New York: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 269-74. The question of the medieval as the unconscious of contemporary theory grows more pressing and is taken up in the issue of the *Minnesota Review*, no. 80 (April 2013), ed. Andrew Cole. On the same problem: Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2005) and Andrew Cole and D. Vance Smith, eds, *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages: On the Unwritten History of Theory* (Duke University Press, 2010) and my review: <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/9063> (accessed November 5, 2012).

⁹ Citations from *King Richard II* are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edition, general editor, Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2008).

¹⁰ Richard II was rumored to be "sodomitical" in his lifetime and Lancastrian propaganda emplotted his alleged sodomitical perversity to justify his deposition after the fact: Sylvia Federico, "Queer Times: Richard II in the Poems and Chronicles of Late Fourteenth-Century England," *Medium Aevum*, 79 (2010): 25-46. Judith Brown offers a beautiful meditation on Richard's queerness in her essay, "Pretty Richard (in Three Parts)," *ShakesQueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. By Madhavi Menon (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp.286-301.

¹¹ David Michael Kleinberg-Levin, *Sites of Vision: The Discursive Construction of Sight in the History of Philosophy* (Boston: MIT Press, 1997), p. 197.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. By Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (University of Chicago Press 1993), p. 126 and the beautiful meditations of John D. Caputo in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) and Anais N. Spitzer's chapter on tears in her study, *Derrida, Myth and the Impossibility of Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 24-45.

- ¹³ Paul A. Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene* (Stanford University Press, 2008). Kottman urges that students "reorient our understanding of politics by making the dramatic scene (or, better, scenes) a fundamental category of political life." (p. 7).
- ¹⁴ Two of my favorite essays in the bibliographic vale of tears: Lance Duerfahrd, "Afterthoughts on Disability: Crying at William Wyler's *Best Years of Our Lives*," in *On the Verge of Tears: Why the Movies, Television, Music, Art, Popular Culture, and the Real World Make us Cry*, ed. by Michele Byers and David Lavery (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 50-66; Éamonn Dunne and Michael O'Rourke, "Miller's Idle Tears," (forthcoming). For an introduction to a bibliography on tears, see the following studies: Elina Gertsman, ed. *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Marjory E. Lange, *Telling Tears in the English Renaissance* (New York: Brill, 1996); Tom Lutz, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: Norton, 1999); Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley, *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Peter Schwenger, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (University of Minneapolis Press, 2006) and for discursive reflections: Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 2001). I have also benefited from this beautiful essay: Annika Thiem, "Adorno's Tears: Textures of Philosophical Emotionality," *MLN* 124 (2009): pp. 592-613;
- ¹⁵ Sandra J. McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction in Medieval England: Holy Tears* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 1990); Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- ¹⁶ The prominent German legal scholar of sovereignty, Carl Schmitt, famously argued for these two criteria of the sovereign in his diptych of works: *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. of *Politisches Theologie* (1922) by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and *The Concept of the Political*, trans. of *Der Begriff des Politischen* by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- ¹⁷ For reflections in desacramentalization see Regina Mara Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism* (Stanford University Press, 2008); Kuchar, *Poetry of Religious Sorrow* and also his *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Duquesne University Press, 2005); David Womersley, *Divinity and State* (Oxford University Press, 2010).
- ¹⁸ See the important essay by Heather Phillips, "John Wyclif and the Optics of the Eucharist", in *From Ockham to Wyclif*, edited by Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks *Studies in Church History, Subsidia* 5 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 245-258, citation of Wyclif appears in Phillips, p. x.; David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2004), pp. 53-66; Dallas G. Denery II, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World: Optics, Theology and Religious Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

- ¹⁹ Christopher Pye richly reflects on the theatricality of grief and treason and invites us to think of tear blots as well as inky blots, "The Betrayal of the Gaze: *Richard II*," in his *The Regal Phantasm: Shakespeare and the Politics of the Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp.82-105. My analysis draws together theological debates over the Real Presence and the question of treason.
- ²⁰ Intimates of the Stefan George circle (of whom Kantorowicz was a loyal member in the 1920s to the death of Stefan George in 1933) might have read such acclamations of Dante as a secret tribute to their Master, Stefan George, who was known to costume himself as Dante in laurels, for photographs and discussion. See Robert E. Norton *Secret Germany: Stefan George and His Circle* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). The text of *Inferno* Canto 34 may be found conveniently at the Princeton Dante Project: <http://www.princeton.edu/dante>. See John A. Scott, "Treachery in Dante," in *Studies in the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Memory of Arnolfo B. Ferruolo*, (Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1985), pp. 27-39
- ²¹ Sylvia Tomasch, "Judecca, Dante's Satan and the Dis-placed Jew", in *Text and Territory: The Geographical Imaginary in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 247-267.
- ²² Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 19.
- ²³ Randolph Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Starn lists the seven counts against Dante and three named co-defendants brought forth by the court (pp. 70-71). They range from forgery (tampering with public documents) to incitement of rebellion. Neither Dante nor his co-defendants appeared in court or responded to the subsequent bans declared against them. On 27 January 1302, the court, following the legal fiction of *ficta litis contestatio* (simulated trial) sentenced them to exile for two years. On the 10 March 1302 the court sentenced Dante and fourteen others under communal ban to death by fire. These legal proceedings expose the vertiginous convergence of accusations of forgery, incitement to rebellion (treason) and ban, since those banned from the commune were regarded as the "enemy" (*hostes*).
- ²⁴ The literature on Kantorowicz is copious also and I cite here a insightful starting point: Boureau, *Kantorowicz: Stories of a Historian*.
- ²⁵ The text of this letter is reproduced in Eckhart Grünewald, *Ernst Kantorowicz und Stefan George: Beiträge zur Bibliographie des Historikers bis zum Jahre 1938 und zu seinem Jugendwerk "Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite"* (Wiesbaden: Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen, 1982), pp. 114-15.

- ²⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 28; Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 102. Agamben comments directly on the *King's Two Bodies* in his *State of Exception*, translated by Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 83-84.
- ²⁷ Lister M. Matheson, "English Chronicle Contexts for Shakespeare's Death of Richard II," in *From Page to Performance: Essays in Early English Drama*, edited by John A. Alford (East Lansing MI: Michigan State University Press, 1995), pp. 195-219.
- ²⁸ Victor Houlston, "Thomas Becket in the propaganda of the English Reformation," *Renaissance Studies*, 7 (1993): pp. 43-70; A.G. Harmon, "Shakespeare's Carved Saints," *Studies in English Literature* 45 (2005): 315-331; Robert E. Scully, "The Unmaking of a Saint: Thomas Becket and the English Reformation," *Catholic Historical Review*, 86 (October 2000): pp. 579-602.
- ²⁹ The OED defines anamorphosis as follows: "a distorted projection or drawing of anything, so made that when viewed from a particular point, or by reflection from a suitable mirror, it appears regular and properly proportioned." Pye, "Betrayal of the Gaze"; Allan Shickman, "The 'Perspective Glass' in Shakespeare's Richard II," *Studies in English Literature*, vol. 18 (Spring 1978): pp. 217-28 and *ibid*, "'Turning Pictures' in Shakespeare's England," *The Art Bulletin*, 59 (March 1977): pp. 67-70; Ernest Gilman, *The Curious Perspective: Literary and Pictorial Wit in the Seventeenth Century* (Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 88-127; Robert M. Schuler, "Magic Mirrors in Richard II," *Comparative Drama* 38 (2004), pp. 151-172; Alison Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking Through Language* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).
- ³⁰ An English translation of Lanfranc's *Liber de corpora et sanguine Domini* (c. 1063) may be found in *The Fathers of the Church. Medieval Continuation*, vol. 10, translated by Mark G. Vaillancourt (Catholic University of America, 2009); hereafter called Lanfranc. Vaillancourt keys his English translation to the Latin text of the *Patrologia Latina* 150: pp. 407-442. For a concise and insightful summary of the Berengar debate see Jean de Montclos, "Lanfranc et Bérengar: les origines de la doctrine de la Transsubstantiation," in *Lanfranco de Pavia e L'europa del secolo XI*, edited by Giulio D'Onofrio (Italia Sacra: Studi e Documenti di Storia Ecclesiastica. Vol. 51 (Rome: Herder Editrice e Libreria, 1993), pp. 297-326. The citation is from Lanfranc, p. 56. See also, Charles M. Radding and Francis Newton, *Theology, Rhetoric, and Politics in the Eucharistic Controversy 1078-1079: Alberic of Monte Cassino against Berengar of Tours* (Columbia University Press, 2003).
- ³¹ The literature is copious and I cite here a few exemplary studies: Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 252-314; Michal Kobiak, *This is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (University of Michigan Press, 1999); Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, "Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept," *American Historical Review* (December 2000): 1489-1533; David Aers and Sarah Beckwith, "Eucharist," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in*

Literary History, ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 153-16; Amy Nelson Burnett, "The Social History of Communion and the Reformation of the Eucharist," *Past and Present*, 211 (2011): pp. 77-119.

- ³² For a recent consideration on Lanfranc on universalism (his resurrection of Augustinian themes) see Patrick Healy, "A Supposed Letter of Archbishop Lanfranc: Concepts of the Universal Church in the Investiture Contest," *English Historical Review*, Vol. CXXI, no. 494 (December 2006): pp. 1385-1407.
- ³³ The text of this Easter play is recorded in both Latin and English in David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), pp. 39-44. See also Thomas P Campbell and Clifford Davidson (eds), *The Fleury Playbook: Essays and Studies*. Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series no. 7 (Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1985). Theresa Tinkle, "Jews in the Fleury Playbook," *Comparative Drama* 38 (2004), pp. 1-38. Shakespeare played with the "quem queritis" trope in several plays as Cynthia Lewis outlines, "Soft Touch: On the Renaissance Staging and Meaning of the 'noli me tangere' Icon," *Comparative Drama*, 36, (2002): pp. 53-73.
- ³⁴ For a major study of the building program at Caen and discussion of its sculpture from the first building phases see, Eric Gustav Carlson, "The Abbey Church of Saint-Etienne at Caen in the Eleventh and early Twelfth Centuries," (University Microfilms, Yale University Ph.D., 1968), pp. 296.
- ³⁵ Michal Kobińska, *This is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 157. My argument disagrees with that of Wolfgang Iser who wrote: "In this context the persona appears as a kind of empty space, and the filling of this space is what constitutes the thrust of the play" in his *Staging Politics: The Lasting Impact of Shakespeare's Histories*, trans. By David Henry Wilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). Instead, I am arguing that Shakespeare attempts to keep the empty space open and uses the sense of seeing through tears to do so.
- ³⁶ Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, construes Shakespeare's "Quem Queritis" scene as a parody and a desacralizing move, pp. 48-53. To complicate the performance of Queen Isabella, recall her biopolitics as a presumably Virgin Queen: born November 9, 1389; wed to Richard II at the age of 7 (1 November, 1396); separated at age 10 by his abdication and imprisonment (1399) and then widowed by the ripe age of 11: Helen Ostovich, "'Here in this garden': The Iconography of the Virgin Queen in Shakespeare's *Richard II*," in *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama*, ed. By Regina Buccola and Lisa Hopkins (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 21-34. The scene of the kiss also reminds us that both Anglican and continental Protestant Eucharistic liturgies removed the "kiss of peace" offered in the congregation after the Communion: Craig Koslofsky, "The Kiss of Peace in the German Reformation," in *The Kiss in History*, ed. by Karen Harvey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 18-35.

Squirm

Eszter Timár

"Liquid is the element of the *pharmakon*"

– Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy"

for Ryanna Gacy

The word I chose for a title encapsulates for me, a non-native speaker of English, a certain cloud of words, affects, and ideas: sperm, semen, swimming, squeamish (etc.: screamish, creamish). This cloud of flowing, seed and aversion marks a tension within what I would like to call, in the wake of Derridean deconstruction, philosophemes of masculine self-sameness or ipseity: between the innermost seed and its protective shield, its indemnity. This tension is made manifest in recent discoveries concerning the complex and vexed relationship between semen and the human immune system. I have a few reasons for looking at these discoveries through the lens of Jacques Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" and his usage of the term "autoimmunity" in his later "Faith and Knowledge: 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone" when making an argument about the queerness of sperm/semen. First, these texts explicitly discuss sperm and the concept of the immune, as Derrida's treatment of *pharmakon* (in "Plato's Pharmacy") and autoimmunity (in "Faith and Knowledge") show the deconstruction at work in concepts of ipseity (of which one is the "immune"), and I will argue that the deconstruction captured by the term "autoimmunity" in Derrida's work also unfolds in these immunological discoveries concerning sperm cells. Second, several of Derrida's texts, "Plato's Pharmacy" among them, are especially useful for queer theory since they help us see queer figures dispersed in the vast expanse of Western textuality in a way which consistently resists the conventional textual limits naturalizing sexual difference.

"Plato's Pharmacy" is in general devoted to the Platonic anxiety about writing. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates refers to writing as *pharmakon*, a word meaning both remedy and poison: The anxiety about writing in part is justified by this ambiguity: when we turn to it as remedy for forgetfulness, we are also

encountering it as poison as it inevitably makes us more forgetful. Throughout the text Derrida traces the ways in which writing for Plato is always suspicious and illegitimate, envisioned as a drug that can bring healing as well as death, an uncontrollably fluid substance infiltrating the body whose internal processes it alters. "Plato's Pharmacy" explicitly connects its key term, the *pharmakon*, to Greek texts where pederasty is devalued because it is a practice of wasting – disseminating – one's seed on unproductive soil. What I propose to do here is to consider the connections between the *pharmakon* of "Plato's Pharmacy," and the subsequent "autoimmunity" of "Faith and Knowledge" (inspired by the medical process of immunosuppression, the term refers to an organism's undoing its own mechanism of self-defence) in the light of recent discoveries in immunology about the "adverse" and complicated relationship between the immune system and sperm; on the one hand, between men's sperm and their own immune system, and on the other, to sperm and the immune system in the uterine environment. I will start by looking at Derrida's discussion of the ancient Greek scapegoating ritual in order to show that our inherited structure of dignified citizenship is based on a figure of masculine virility envisioning an image of the seed being protected by a shield. In order to show that current immunological discoveries trouble this conventional structure in the way Derrida introduced his usage of autoimmunity, I will give a short exposition of that usage and will also show ways in which something like that usage is already at work in "Plato's Pharmacy." After this journey from "Plato's Pharmacy," "Faith and Knowledge," and back, I will turn to the question of our sperm's encounters with the immune system.

It is as part of the general discussion on the semantic field of *pharmakon* in "Plato's Pharmacy" that Derrida pays considerable attention to the function of the scapegoat – the *pharmakos* – in ancient Greek society. While the actual details of the process of scapegoating varied across times and cultures, it was in general a powerful ritual of purifying the community through excommunication culminating in banishing the scapegoat from the city by chasing him (and/or her) outside city limits (Allen, 2000, p. 85).

Since scapegoating targeted marginalized members of society (the poor, the ugly, the criminally marked, and marginalized women) and at the same time, some legal punishments also took the form of excommunication, we should be careful not to simply consider scapegoating as the exemplary ritual

for stripping a citizen of his community membership. However, we can detect a correspondence between the logic of dignified citizenship (and the way that logic was publicly demonstrated) and the public ritual of scapegoating. Let me here briefly refer to the fifth chapter of David Halperin's seminal *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality And Other Essays on Greek Love*, where he outlines this logic very clearly: a citizen is someone who has the obligation to live up to certain standards of trustworthiness and conduct and is protected by physical inviolability (1990, pp. 88-113).¹ For example, a citizen could only assault another citizen if he caught him in adulterous activity with his wife. A citizen could be executed but not flogged. Furthermore, a citizen could be punished with partial or total loss of his citizen status if he did not pay taxes, did not represent his own opinion in public, accepted money for sexual services, or failed to take care of his dependents. The punishment, *atimía* (dishonor), included the loss of the right to participate in political life, what Danielle Allen calls "internal exile" (2000, p. 230), it could include heavy fines, and the *atimos* could also be exiled or executed (Hansen, 1999, p. 99).²

From the above we can distill that a citizen – a privileged member of the adult male population – is distinguished by a sense of "internal" honor which is protected by a legal immunity from physical violence. This internal honor is the very kernel of citizenship; and it is an honor that the person can betray or relinquish at the price of losing protection in the form of *atimía*. Honor was both a public and a moral concept. The right and responsibility to speak one's own mind in public (especially at the agora) is intimately bound up with the honor of the citizen. Indeed, prostituting oneself entailed *atimía* as the person in question could not be considered trustworthy, or loyal to his own will since he was ready to sexually relinquish the loyalty towards his masculine-dignified self for financial benefits. This readiness suggested that he is likely to do the same politically: to speak for another citizen in public, or be hired by another to say something as if it were in his own name. In other words, the stigma of prostitution could be used to disqualify people politically. As John Heath cites from a lost comedy of Nicostratus: "Surely you know that freedom of speech (*parrhêsia*) is a weapon (*hoplon*) against poverty? If someone should lose it, he will have thrown away the shield (*aspida*) of life" (2005, p. 180).³ Freedom of speech is the guarantee of dignity that equalizes citizens by allowing and compelling them to speak their own mind; advancing their own will. This dignity, which springs forth from within the citizen's body, deserves a shield – a shield of life. At the same time the quotation above intimates that

this shield is required for survival and that stripping a man of this shield ends his political life (which could extend to murder).

Masculine dignity, then, is erected by the combination of the image of an internal substance ready for authoritative emission protected by an encasing shield. It is the same structure that orients our conventional ways of conceptualizing sperm and the immune system. The sperm, the internal kernel of masculinity, ready for a similarly authoritative emission (in the same way as a man's opinion is emitted in the form of speech) is encased in the human body protected by the "shield of life." Sperm appears in Derrida's discussion of the *pharmakos* as a part of the public performance of the loss of this shield:

In general, the *pharmakoi* were put to death. But that, it seems, was not the essential end of the operation. Death occurred most often as a secondary effect of an energetic fustigation. Aimed first at the genital organs. Once the *pharmakoi* were cut off from the space of the city, the blows were designed to chase away or draw out the evil from their bodies. (1981, pp. 131-2)

While the logic of the rite described is not quite the same as the logic of *atimía* (the latter only concerned citizens), there is a connection between excommunication and public assault outside of the limits of the space of belonging. It is significant that the locus of exorcism is the genitals: the evil is imagined here as corrupting the *pharmakos'* body exactly in the center of his virility. Scapegoating and *atimía* are practices in which belonging is suspended or severed in reference to a crisis of virility. A similar motif of beating the *pharmakos* on the genitals occurs in Allen's discussion of the ritual (2000, p. 160). These references, however, all point to one fragment from the poet Hipponax which reads: "They set the victim in an appropriate place, put cheese, barley cake and dried figs in his hand, flogged him seven times on his penis with squills, wild fig branches and other wild plants, and finally burned him on wood from wild trees and scattered his ashes in the sea and winds in order to purify the city of its ills" (Gerber (trans. & ed.), 1999, p. 359). Since this is the only textual trace of this motif, Jan Bremmer has raised some doubts about its empirical reliability; and complicated the question further by suggesting that if this is a case of poetic license, we cannot even be sure whether it comes from Hipponax or Tzetzes, the 11th century poet who relayed the fragment to us (Bremmer, 1983, p. 300-

301). What I think is significant here, however, is that modern readers of this passage – including Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (Derrida's source), Derrida, and Allen – seem to want to trust it as an accurate description of the ritual (whose codes, as Bremmer shows, varied quite a bit across cultures). Somehow, beating the scapegoat on the genitals after having chased him outside the city limits sits well with the whole idea of the *pharmakos*. Perhaps because we (including Tzetzes) have since Hipponax' times inherited the Greek cultural codes of citizenship which revolved around masculine figures of virility: the seed (the voice) and the shield. Stripping the scapegoat of the symbolic shield outside the space of belonging allows for the figure of beating on the genitals to act as an especially powerful cultural image.⁴ As I will argue next, it is this figurative structure of double virility of seed and shield which is troubled by Derrida's use of the term "autoimmunity," as well as contemporary biology's results concerning the (sometimes autoimmune) relationship between sperm and the immune system.

Derrida introduced autoimmunity, a term some scholars consider especially successful at conveying the meaning of deconstruction (Naas, 2006, p. 18; Bennington, 2010, p. 27-8), in his "Faith and Knowledge: Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone." He provides an explanatory footnote, which I will quote it in its entirety:

The "immune" (*immunis*) is freed or exempted from the charges, the service, the taxes, the obligations (*munus*, root of the common of community). This freedom of this exemption was subsequently transported into the domains of constitutional or international law (parliamentary or diplomatic immunity), but is also belongs to the history of the Christian Church and to canon law; the immunity of temples also involved the inviolability if the asylum that could be found there (Voltaire indignantly attacked this "immunity of temples" as a "revolting example" of "contempt for the laws" and of "ecclesiastical ambition"); Urban VIII created a congregation of ecclesiastical immunity: against police searches, etc. it is especially in the domain of biology that the lexical resources of immunity have developed their authority. The immunitary reaction protects the "indemnity" of the body proper in producing antibodies against foreign antigens. As for the process of auto-immunization, which interests us particularly here, it consists for

a living organism, as is well known and in short, of protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system. As the phenomenon of these antibodies is extended to a broader zone of pathology and as one resorts increasingly to the positive virtues of immuno-depressants destined to limit the mechanisms of rejection and to facilitate the tolerance of certain organ transplants, we feel ourselves authorized to speak of a sort of general logic of auto-immunization. It seems indispensable to us today for thinking the relations between faith and knowledge, religion and science, as well as the duplicity of sources in general. (Derrida, 2002, p. 80)

Derrida traces the history of the usage of the “immune” in order to arrive at and focus on the medical practice of immunosuppression employed in organ transplantation. Immunosuppression, the act of weakening the patient’s immune system, is necessary so that the newly transplanted organ can be accepted by the host body. The partial deactivation of the body’s system of self-defense in these cases serves the purpose of ensuring the patient’s chances to stay alive longer – it is in the interest of the survival of the organism that the organism’s self defenses must be suppressed. In giving an exposition of the heritage of the political concept of immunity selected for the contemporary biomedical construct of the immune system, Derrida not only traces the biological use of an older political model, but in the process, and most importantly, shows the unfolding of deconstruction. Being consistently vigilant about terms of ipseity throughout his oeuvre, Derrida tends to mention a series of terms together in “Faith and Knowledge” time after time: the unscathed, the *heilig*, the holy—and the *immunis* is added to the series as a term for bounding or limiting – a seclusion from that which is posited as external – a “shield of life,” as it were. The internal is made private through this gesture of exemption from the common. Indeed, the immune system figures in conventional medical discourse as a protective shield, part of the organism but separate from it as a whole—it is what protects and guarantees the body’s wholeness against the external world, which always already threatens to intrude. Derrida is interested in the lexical developments provided by medical advances as the medical community’s need to communicate and name new technologies forces it to inflect the lexical heritage of immunity. Both this heritage and the inflection in question are of special significance for deconstruction as they highlight a link between the philosopheme of ipseity and the idea of exemption (which Derrida always finds worthy of critique).⁵ The inflection Derrida points out in the

footnote makes explicit within this language of immunity a necessary corollary to the discourse of defense: that the ongoing survival of any system or organism depends on a radical openness to its outside, indeed to the fact that that in some ways the absolute limit is untenable – it can and has to break down.

In Derrida's usage here, auto-immunization renders the *autos* immune to its own immune system, or, more precisely, auto-immunization makes the immune system lose its immunity and succumb to the violence of the *autos*. Autoimmunity here, then, is not identified in the way medical science discusses autoimmunity, i.e. as a process in which an overly active immune system attacks the cells belonging to its own organism, but rather as its very opposite: a process in which the immune system is rendered weak and unable to carry on its defensive work.⁶ In introducing the term of auto-immunization, the lexicon of biology reflects on and inflects the discourse of immunity, which posits threat as always coming from the outside, against which self-sameness or ipseity should be protected by a never-ceasing policing which itself threatens the organism's survival. Perfect immunity is perfectly fatal.

Taking my point from a subsequent text where Derrida refers to *pharmakon* as an "old name" for what he calls the "autoimmunitary logic" (2004, p. 124), I will at this point go back to "Plato's Pharmacy" in search for immunity and the inflected autoimmunity. I would also like to show that the logic of autoimmunity at work there makes itself felt in queer terms shared by contemporary immunology. Simply put, the immune appears as allergy in "Plato's Pharmacy", which is identified as the very essence of illness: "The natural illness of the living is defined in its essence as an allergy, a reaction to the aggression of an alien element" (1981, p. 101). A little later he adds: "The immortality and perfection of a living being would consist in its having no relation at all with any outside. That is the case with God... God has no allergies" (1981, p. 101).

Illness understood as allergy refers to the urgency of the body's own mechanism responding to elements it considers threatening. Allergies demonstrate that it is not the actual danger brought on by pathogens that trigger the body's defense mechanism: the actual trigger is the decision to treat something as a pathogen: as a harbinger of threat. Technically speaking, allergy is not quite an autoimmune phenomenon – but it is very close to it. From a medical point of view, allergy and

autoimmunity are both effects of immune activity endangering or weakening the organism. In the case of an allergy, something decidedly unharmful is treated by the immune system as a threat; in fact, the danger for the organism as a whole lies in the stubborn, and often very taxing reaction against this “false” threat. In cases of autoimmune disorders, the immune system attacks host cells.

Derrida’s insight that allergy is the essence of illness reflects the fact that immune activity is always part of illness, and so the danger necessarily stems from immune activity taxing the organism. While there are cases where medicine identifies “justified” immune reactions (in the presence of foreign bodies capable of obstructing the organism’s survival), these are triggered by antigens – and in the case of allergy and autoimmune disorders, illness can emerge without threatening external invasion. Immune activity, or violent defense, is necessarily threatening. To the extent that allergy is indeed very similar to autoimmune processes, Derrida here articulates the dominant medical meaning of autoimmunity which he reverses into immunosuppression in “Faith and Knowledge.”

If the political stakes of what is grasped in the *immunis* in “Faith and Knowledge” corresponds to allergy in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” autoimmunity in the later texts corresponds to the *pharmakon*. Like autoimmunity, the *pharmakon* resonates most conventionally in the registers of illness, health and medicine as a threat posed by the confusion of the internal and the external, or an irreducible openness to the external, the necessary intrusion of which modulates immunity or the logic of life (i.e. allergy): “if the *pharmakon* is pernicious, it is because... it doesn’t come from around here. It comes from afar, it is external, or alien: to the living, which is the right-here of the inside, the *logos* as the *zōon* it claims to assist or relieve” (1981, p. 103). As a “supplementary parasite” (1981, p. 103), the *pharmakon* is also necessarily more than an intruding, life-sapping force: it is a foundational ambivalence. This ambivalence seems to foreshadow “Faith and Knowledge” where autoimmunity can come to mean something close to allergy in “Plato’s Pharmacy” as well as immunosuppression:

If the *pharmakon* is “ambivalent,” it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.). it is on the basis of this play

or movement that the opposites or differences are stopped... The *pharmakon* is the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the difference of difference. It holds in reserve, in its undecided shadow and vigil, the opposites and the differends that the process of discrimination will come to carve out. (Derrida, 1981, p. 101).

“Plato’s Pharmacy” focuses on writing – writing as *pharmakon* (ambivalently both poison and remedy): it is writing that is shown to be queer through and through. It is as writing that the *pharmakon* is linked to sperm and allergies. Good writing is close to the source of life; a good son, and bad writing is orphaned, bastard writing; a traitor, responsible for its father’s death. To the extent that it is associated with *pharmakon* (with all kinds of potent fluids), makeup, dye, sorcery and sperm is then inherently suspect, failing to represent its true self. Sperm, as seed, not only wants to go into the same sex, and fall on lesser feminine lands – it is also connected to immature play, and thrives at festivals where it can uncontrollably flow. Perfume, masks, makeup and color all cloak sperm in a frivolous costume, rendering it effeminate, masquerading and unruly (Derrida, 1981, pp. 149-152). In one word, in several of its currently circulating meanings, queer: sperm as *pharmakon* fails to demonstrate orderly heteronormativity; its tendency to flow in a bastardly manner disrespects and relinquishes legitimacy; its insistence on puerile joys shows a quasi-pathological weakness unworthy of the privilege of dignity.

In what follows I will suggest that the same constellation of queerness emerges around sperm in recent studies in immunology; and the resulting multi-faceted and often adverse relationship between the immune system and sperm, mediated by processes of writing and reading, effectively disturbs the conventional figure of masculine ipseity, with its double composition of seed/emission and its protective shield. The relationship between immune system and sperm features all of the senses in which Derrida uses the term autoimmunity in “Plato’s Pharmacy” (as allergy) and in “Faith and Knowledge (as immunosuppression), producing opportunities for hacking and grafting.

Sperm is immunogenic as it develops in the body after the immune system has established itself. Partly because of this time lag, the immune system does not recognize sperm cells as host cells Fijak and Meinhardt (2006, p. 66.). Indeed, when sperm gets into the bloodstream, due to some trauma breaking

the blood-testis boundary, certain immune cells attack them causing an autoimmune inflammation. In the last 7-8 years there is an increasing number of studies offering surprising findings pertaining to the problem of protecting sperm from the immune system. While what we can claim to know about these things seems to change rapidly for the purpose of this article I will rely on three texts reporting on the relationship between the immune system and sperm.

Fijak and Meinhardt (2006) describe several ways in which sperm is protected from the immune system. In the testis of the host body, the normal patrolling and general activities of immune cells are suppressed and/or modified and the number of certain type of immune cells are radically lower. Moreover, immunosuppression seems to be carried out in part by immune activity: through the expression of anti-inflammatory cytokines and by testicular dendritic cells, which suppress antigen-specific immunity. In addition, immune cells within the testis are involved in the production of androgens such as testosterone (in other words, they have a modified function). As a result, the blood-testis barrier seems to delineate the testis as a domain of immune privilege. The testis is immune from the immune system.

Pang et. al. (2007) describe the way sperm enjoys a different sort of immunity from the immune system in the uterine environment by bearing a special glycoprotein. The category of the host cell is established in the ongoing communication between immune cells and the cells they encounter. Host cells will be recognized by immune cells as such, if their surface feature major histocompatibility class I (MHC-I) molecules. Conversely, cells that lack MHC-I will not be recognized as host cells. Sperm lacks the MHC-I complex: it appears that "sperm precursors down-modulate their MHC class I molecules" (2007, p. 36593) However, other markers can also trigger immuno-tolerance. Apart from the protection of the environment of the testis, sperm is protected through a specific glycoprotein marker, which allows it to by-pass most immune cells, with the exception of mast cells. In environments other than the uterus, mast cells attack sperm, as may be seen even in the host body. The uterus, however, is an environment where, just as in the testis, the number of mast cells is very low, which ensures the relatively high survival of incoming sperm cells. The glycoprotein carried by sperm cells is equipped with a so-called Lewis sequence which gives the cells immunity against the immune cells they are likely to encounter in the uterine environment. The fact that most uterine environments do not contain

sperm antibodies (although some do!) is the outcome of the combination of specific local immunological mixes, made up mostly of immune cells that decode the Lewis sequence as a passport of sorts – recognizing the cells as foreign but refraining from attacking them.

These two studies show that the immune system attacks sperm everywhere except in the testis and (in most cases) the uterus. Protection in the testis is established by the multiple process of immune privilege; in the uterus it is guaranteed by the appearance of the Lewis sequence on sperm marking it “foreign but OK.” It is important that the Lewis sequence allows entry into a body different from that of the testis where the sperm was generated. Exhibiting the Lewis sequence on the cell surface (instead of the MHC-I complex) means that the uterine immunity of the female body will not harm sperm cells even though they clearly lack the female body’s MHC-I complexes.

This in turn means that the Lewis sequence, which cannot be unique to specific bodies but needs to be consistently legible across different ones, necessarily acts as a kind of *carte blanche* of antigens, a general passport valid in all bodies. In fact, several other formations use the Lewis sequence to enjoy similar privileges: some aggressive cancer cells, the HIV virus, and even some parasites use this passport to go unharmed by most immune cells. In other words, the need for the sperm to cross through bodies in order to fulfill their reproductive function creates the possibility for rendering some maladies immunologically irresistible (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2007).

I started this article suggesting that the Greek logic of masculinity figures as an internal seed or voice ready for emission encased in a shield of life where the former constructs self-sameness or ipseity as the basis for the privilege of dignity and autonomy. Following Derrida’s consistent tendency to not separate political language from the language of life or biology, and to look to biology as a domain where political concepts can be and are deconstructed, I see these immunological results similarly: these studies, in inflecting the discourse of immunity, effectively queer both the sperm and the immune system. They tell a story in which the very seed of masculine ipseity, the sperm, is also the queerest cell in the environments it inhabits and visits. As a bearer of the Lewis sequence, it manifests in a way which the unfolding lexicon of biology shows to be the autoimmunitary logic of the *pharmakon*: it belongs nowhere, it always comes from a conceptual outside and is marked as exterior

while at the same time it is allowed to flow to multiple terrains. The sperm has no proper home – it is either internally or externally exiled. Both Derridean meanings of autoimmunity apply to sperm. Outside the uterus and the testis, it provokes the immune system into attack, causing autoimmune symptoms. At the same time, for its protection within the testis, it compels the immune system to suppress its patrolling activity and transform itself into a practice of nurturance. The hard ipseity of the shield loses its status as essence and gives way to a yielding readiness to self-corrupt its masculinity in a self-imposed process of immunosuppression. Outside the male body, in the uterus, it is the agent of corruption which allows, or indeed invites ills: it facilitates the introduction of the internal and external enemies considered most threatening and emaciating – cancer, HIV and parasites. Here, as in the testis, sperm also queers what it encounters: as a reader of the Lewis sequence, the immune system ceases to appear as a solid shield; instead it figures as weakened or failed discernment. Sperm, then, also demonstrates the corrupting power conventionally appropriated to perversion: queerness is so dangerous because it spreads by contagion. Sperm is never indigenous – wherever it is found, it is the *pharmakon*: “the *pharmakon* always penetrates like a liquid; it is absorbed, drunk, introduced into the inside, which it first marks with the hardness of the type, soon to invade it and inundate it with its medicine, its brew, its drink, its potion, its poison” (Derrida, 1981, p. 152).

There is, then, a strong consonance between Derrida’s writings, as exemplified by his discussions of the tropes of illness, allergy, *pharmakon* and autoimmunity, and contemporary immunology. Immunology is a domain where the force of the conventional shield-like image of immunity is effectively critiqued and inflected in a way that shows the *pharmakon*-like quality of immune function: immunity is always autoimmunity: the “allergy” of “Plato’s Pharmacy” and “immunosuppression” of “Faith and Knowledge” both constitute the protection of survival. To the extent that these results, showing queer figures at the heart of the communicative logic of reproduction, are similar in the way they inflect inherited tropes of virility to the inflection introduced by the immunosuppression in organ transplants, they could be, perhaps, understood as an illustration of the opening of “Plato’s Pharmacy”: “The dissimulation of the woven texture can in any case take centuries to undo its web” (Derrida, 1981, p. 63).

Notes

- ¹ My brief summary of *atimía* and its applications was also informed by Danielle S. Allen's *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens* (Allen, 2000) and Mogens Herman Hansen's *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology* (Hansen, 1999).
- ² Scapegoating was an ancient religious custom (Allen, 2000, p. 85). The practice of ostracism (not discussed by Derrida) was similar to it in form: every year one citizen was voted to be sent into a ten-year exile. However, this was not a religious practice anymore, and usually people of considerable social power were excommunicated so as to prevent their rise to tyranny (Hansen, 1999, p. 35). *Atimía*, in contrast was a punitive outcome of a regular court case (Hansen, 1999, p.99).
- ³ Based on Halperin's analysis as well as Hansen's detailed explanations of practices and regulations throughout his book, it is clear that the ideology of *parrhêsia* strengthened the position of the more well off at the expense of the poor among the citizen body, and the accusation of prior prostitution was a powerful weapon of delegitimizing motions set forth by poorer citizens (who may or may not have been hired to put forth the motion—as it was indeed a very common practice at the agora). The quote shows the irony of all this in the ambiguous meaning of "weapon against poverty."
- ⁴ Another figurative thread of virile citizenship which can support the viability and cultural transmission of the beating image is the Roman motif of swearing, giving testimony, by touching one's genitals. Here the voice is explicitly authenticated by a tactile reference to the seed. While exploring this thread, Joshua T. Katz traces the Indo-European etymology of Latin *testis* to testimony (Katz, 1998).
- ⁵ For instance, prior to turning to the language of immunity, in between the composition of "Plato's Pharmacy" and "Faith and Knowledge," in *The Post Card*, he repeatedly refers to tax exemption as paralysis.
- ⁶ For discussions of Derrida's use of autoimmunity in this footnote, see Alice Andrews' and Samir Haddad's work (Andrews, 2011; Haddad, 2004). I have also written on this elsewhere (Timar, 2013).

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Fluid Truth¹

Shannon Bell

Female Ejaculation—"shooting hot sticky liquid out of one's urethral with great velocity" (Bell, 2010, 39)—is the political female body event of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. That is, if politics and the political are understood the way in which Jacques Rancière understands them: as "an intervention in the visible and the sayable" which makes "what was unseen visible" and "what was audible as mere noise heard as speech" (Rancière, 2010, pp. 37-8). And, if event, *a la* Alain Badiou, is taken to be an unsuspected eruption that ruptures the routine operation of power, in this case the hegemonic heterosexual male point of view and the sexuated body-politic of language and culture underpinning the knowledge of what a male and a female body can do. This essay will use key concepts formulated by two of the currently most influential French philosophers—Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière—to present the truth event of female ejaculation. A not unimportant secondary objective is to show the fluid applicability of high theory to sites not imagined by the originators of the theory.

The radical feminist philosopher Catharine MacKinnon contends, "The male perspective is systematic and hegemonic. ... [M]ost men adhere to it, nonconsciously and without considering it a point of view, ... because it makes sense of their experience [and] because it is in their interest. It is rational for them" (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 114). This systematic and hegemonic male perspective can be taken as equivalent to what Rancière identifies as the "logic of *arkhê*" which "presupposes that a determinate superiority is exercised over an equally determinate inferiority" (2010, p. 31). The "logic of *arkhê*" is at the core of what Rancière terms "the police", operating as the opposite of politics. He notes, "For a political subject – and therefore for politics – to come to pass, it is necessary to break with this logic" (2010, p. 30). Politics or democracy works "as a rupture in the logic of *arkhê*" (2010, p. 31); "Politics," the way Rancière sees it, is

the activity that breaks with the order of the police by inventing new subjects ... new forms of collective enunciation ... new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time – in short, new bodily capacities. (2010, p. 139)

Female Ejaculator (FE) Militant Subjects

One of the political subjects that ruptures the logic of *arkhê* and the police sexual order is the ejaculating female subject, traversing the process of what Alain Badiou *a la* Jacques Lacan terms *subjectivization*—in the first instance, through a hysterical cut into, a noisy disruption, of hegemonic heterosexuality. This first cut was the body disturbances and genital mucous secretions documented by Sigmund Freud in his work with Dora and the neurasthenic female ejaculators that Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing found among a female prison population and documented in *Psychopathia Sexualis*. While these subjects were not mute in terms of the noise of resistance, they were not speaking militant political subjects. Rather, they were spoken about in dominant psychoanalytic and sexological discourses. *Subjectivization*, as understood by Badiou, “is that through which a truth is possible” (2005, p. 393). For Badiou there are three dimensions to a truth-process: the event, the fidelity and the truth. As Badiou states: “For the process of truth to begin, something must happen” (Badiou, 2002, lecture). The truth process of female ejaculation began when Female Ejaculator (FE) militant subjects, such as myself (Shannon Bell) and Deborah Sundahl, started to and continue to speak on female ejaculation publically by teaching workshops, writing texts, producing our own films and doing documentary footage for television documentaries, such as Gilles Boyon and Segolene Hanotiaux’s 2011 documentary film, *G-Spotting: A Story of Pleasure and Promise*.

Female ejaculation is an *event* for feminist thought and sexuality in much the same way that "Marx is an event for political thought because he designates, under the name "proletariat", the central void of early bourgeois societies" (Badiou, 2001, p. 69).

Bell and Sundahl, and other FE militant subjects such as Annie Sprinkle and Carol Queen, designate under the name of "female ejaculation" the central void of female sexuality. It is this void that MacKinnon, through radical feminism, positions as the absence on which male sexuality is grounded:

women is identified as a being who identifies and is identified as one whose sexuality exists for someone else, who is socially male. What is termed women's sexuality is the capacity to arouse desire in that someone. (1989, p. 118)

MacKinnon poses the question: "If what is sexual about a woman is what the male point of view requires for excitement, for arousal and satisfaction, have male requirements so usurped its terms to have become them?" (1989, p. 118). Consciousness-raising, the method of radical feminism, showed female sexuality under male control to be negation of self as subject: "Man fucks woman; subject verb object" (1989, p. 124).

In 1989, the same year in which MacKinnon's *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* was published, the ejaculating female began her collective enunciation, presenting images and texts initially inside a queer feminist discourse. [See Appendix I: Female Ejaculation Event 1988-2012]. This, in retrospect, became the event of female ejaculation which brought "to pass 'something other' than the situation, opinions, instituted knowledges" (Badiou, 2001, p. 67) that predominated concerning what a female body could do. The Female Ejaculation event was a "hazardous, unpredictable supplement" (Badiou, 2001, p. 67); "a multiple on the edge of the void" (Badiou, 2005, p. 202).

Gilles Boyon and Segolene Hanotiaux's 2011 documentary film, *G-Spotting: A Story of Pleasure and Promise*, featuring footage from a workshop with me, broadcast on French and Swedish television and screened at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) in November 2012, is one of the latest inscribing and naming of "the situated void of that for which it is an event" (Badiou, 2001, p. 69); it is an act of fidelity. Recall that, for Badiou, the event is both situated and supplementary, never fully decidable, "one-multiple made up of ... all the multiples that belong to its site ... and the event itself" (Badiou, 2005, p. 179). Fidelity "amounts to a sustained investigation of the situation [female sexuality] under the imperative of the event [female ejaculation] itself" (Badiou, 2001, p. 67). Boyon and Hanotiaux, in their promotional abstract for the IDFA screening of *G-Spotting: A Story of Pleasure and Promise*, repose their work as a fidelity to previous investigations into the G-spot and female ejaculation:

G-spotting is a joyful and surprising film, with colorful characters, exploring science, sexual liberation, ideological conflicts, and of course ... pleasure. How, in 2010, can there still exist myths around female sexuality? How can the simple mention of this erogenous zone provoke such argument, doubt, and salacious laughter? How can a simple erogenous zone mysteriously denominated as the "G-Spot" be known to all yet ... no-one (or almost no-one) knows its location, its physiology or the story of its discovery? *G-spotting* is an investigation into the heart of the fascinating world of scientific sexology. (IDFA, n.d.)

G-Spotting "gathers together and produces" (Badiou, 2001, p. 68) what is now broadly accepted as the truth about female genital anatomy and the female body's capacity for female ejaculation, this time for a broader television audience. The truth of the female body's sexual capacity "punches a 'hole' in knowledges, it is heterogeneous to them, but it is also the ... source of new knowledges" (Badiou, 2001, 70). Badiou continues: "We shall say that the truth *forces* knowledges" (2001, p. 70). "Force" indicates that a new

truth comes into being "by violating established and circulating knowledges" (Badiou, 2001, p. 70). *G-Spotting* pitched by Boyon and Hanotiaux as "a joyful and surprising film, with colorful characters," perhaps to sell it to television networks, is in its publicity an understated approach to "forcing new bits of knowledge". In the film the female body capacity for ejaculation is confirmed by Dr. Francisco Santamaria Cabello as he discusses the presence of PSA [prostate specific antigen] in female ejaculate and post-orgasm urine. Cabello's laboratory research found that all women whose pre- and post-orgasm urine his team tested have PSA in urine after orgasm, even if they do not know that they ejaculate. The film transitions from Cabello's laboratory work to the FE workshops I teach, primarily at Come As You Are (<http://www.comeasyouare.com/toronto-store-information/sex-workshops/>)². The film narrator states: "Thanks to Cabello the field of sexology is no longer in the dark about the anatomy of squirting." Then the narrator qualifies: "But his discovery that all women might be capable of ejaculation is something that has been well known in some subcultures for many years." Of course, these subcultures are queer feminist communities

Female Ejaculation Force

I wrote the first set of instructions on how to female ejaculate in "Q: What Shoots and Sprays, Shoots and Sprays, Shoots and Sprays? A: A Woman" published, as the feature article for the International Women's Day issue of the lesbian magazine *Rites* in 1989.³ The issue included black and white images of me doing two different types of female ejaculation – the spurting gush and the jet stream – and two texts, one which traced the genealogy of female ejaculation and one entitled "The Everywoman's Guide to Ejaculation", which provided step-by-step directions on how to ejaculate:

Step One: Find what has come to be known as your G-spot; don't call it that, it is named after Gräfenberg, a man. It is the muscle and spongy tissue around that part of your urethra that is on the top wall of your vagina. It is about half a finger (more or less) inside your vagina and about

a finger across – about two inches. If the muscles that go around your vagina have not been used too much (mine weren't) they have to be built up. The muscles can be built up by doing contractions: pressing the top of your vagina against the bottom and releasing. **DON'T WORRY:** Strong muscles will not hold the penis in place; they will push it out when your ducts get full and you want to shoot.

Step Two: Using whichever hand you usually masturbate with, take two or three fingers and rub them against the part of your urethra inside your vagina. Press hard and notice the feeling of having to pee. You don't, this is the signal that you are ready to ejaculate. Now, place the middle finger slightly below the external part of your urethra and begin to masturbate the same way you rub your clit. As you are doing this you will notice the two ducts, one at each side of your urethra, feel full and perhaps somewhat painful; you have another 30 or so ducts scattered in the urethral sponge on the top wall of your vagina. Once you get into the body feeling you may be able to locate them externally on your lower abdomen. They are located in a pyramid from your clit to just near your ovaries.

Step Three: Take your other hand and press down on one or more of the ducts from the outside. Push your urethra out and push the way you do when you pee. A crucial aspect of ejaculating is that it is necessary to **PUSH OUT**. Liquid will come shooting out perhaps in a steady stream or jet.

I can ejaculate only in positions in which I can push my entire pelvis out and up: on my knees with legs a foot and a half apart; on my back with my ass raised up, weight distributed on my feet and shoulders, and knees

at least two feet apart; squatting, standing, again with feet far enough apart so I can push my urethra up and out. As a veteran ejaculator, following stimulation on my urethra and urethral sponge I can ejaculate by just pushing out.

If your partner is female, you may be able to help her ejaculate. As you stimulate her anterior vaginal wall and the exterior part of her urethra, get her to push out when she is ready. You will both feel the glands and ducts around the urethra swelling and filling with liquid.

What ejaculation will do for you sexually is to give you a powerful kinesthetic, visual, and auditory experience – a total body experience. You can repeat it almost indefinitely once your body awakens to it. Seeing and hearing your body fluid put out fire gives one a whole new relation to the environment.

The ejaculate changes in amount, color, odor and taste during your menstrual cycle. At ovulation the fluid is very hot (it corresponds to your vaginal temperature), thick, yellowish and pungent. Following ovulation the fluid is thinner, there is more of it, it is clear and pleasantly salty. It remains this way until bleeding starts at which point it is again thick for the first day or so. It then returns to being clear and copious. I have found that ejaculation during ovulation – because it reduces vaginal temperature – reduces yeast infections that result from the increase in vaginal temperature at ovulation.⁴

Later in 1989, filmmaker Kath Daymond and I did *Nice Girls Don't Do It*, the first film on female ejaculation.⁵ It was a 13-minute truth pastiche of knowledge, porn and technical instruction.

This is not to say that female ejaculation did not exist before the end of the 1980s. On the contrary, female ejaculation has a long history. Following the 1980s queer feminist female ejaculation event this history has been retrospectively reformulated as the popular culture genealogical fidelity of female ejaculation. Make no mistake, if queer feminist political militants had not ruptured the old order of female sexuality with new knowledge and practices, female ejaculation would not be an event. Rather, female ejaculation would have continued to suffer the fate of what Michel Foucault termed "subjugated knowledge": it would appear for a moment now and then in a specific discourse (philosophy, medicine, pornography, sexology) only to be submerged out of view for extended periods of time throughout history.

Postevental Genealogical Fidelity of Female Ejaculation⁶

Female ejaculation has been the object of medical and philosophical discourses since the early Greeks, with the meanings ascribed to it varying considerably over the course of Western history. Female ejaculation has typically been framed in five ways: as fecundity; sexual pleasure; social deviance; medical pathology; and as a scientific problem. Aristotle, in the *Generation of Animals*, connected female fluid with pleasure:

Some think that the female contributes semen in coition because the pleasure she experiences is sometimes similar to that of the male, and also is attended by a liquid discharge. But this discharge is not seminal ... The amount of this discharge when it occurs is sometimes on a different scale from the emission of semen and far exceeds it. (1912, II, 28a)

The expulsion of female fluids during sexual excitement was taken by many pre-Enlightenment thinkers to be a normal and pleasurable part of female sexuality. Well into the eighteenth century, what cultural historian Thomas Laqueur terms the "one-sex model" predominated. In this model, male and female are seen as versions of one another, both in the anatomical sense that the vagina is an internal penis, and in the

physiological sense that the fluids in men and women are interchangeable.⁷ Perhaps the greatest controversy within the one-sex model was between one-seed and two-seed theories of generation, which revolved around whether female fluids were progenitive. Hippocrates and Galen argued for the existence of the female seed, Aristotle that the fluid was pleasurable but not progenitive (Laqueur, 1990, pp.40-2).

Throughout the Middle Ages, Western scholars remained faithful to Hippocrates and Galen's notion of female sperm, which came to them through Arabic medicine. In the sixteenth century, Italian anatomist Renaldus Columbus linked the clitoris with semen, ejaculation and pleasure: "If you rub it vigorously with a penis, or touch it even with a little finger, semen swifter than air flies this way and that on account of the pleasure" (cited in Laqueur, 1990, p. 66). Female-to-female instruction is present in seventeenth-century whore dialogue, an early genre of erotic writing that combines pornographic tales with educational instruction in which an older woman teaches a young virgin about the female sex organ. In a dialogue between Tullia and her younger cousin Octavia, they discuss female ejaculation:

Tullia: Towards the upper Part of the C__t, is a thing they call Clitoris; which is a little like a Man's P__k, for it will send forth a Liquor, which when it comes away, leaves us in a Trance, as if we were dying, all our Senses being lost, and our Eyes shut[.]

Octavia: You describe Things so exactly, that me thinks I see all that is within me. (Chorier, [1660.], p. 11–12)

The seventeenth-century Dutch anatomist Regnier de Graaf, in his *New Treatise Concerning the Generative Organs of Women*, outlined the Hippocratic and Aristotelian controversy over female semen, in which he sided with the Aristotelians and denied the existence of female semen. In describing the ejection of female fluid, de Graaf wrote: "it should be noted that the discharge from the female prostatae causes as much pleasure

as does that from the male prostatae" ([1672], p. 107). He identified the source of the fluid as the "ducts and lacunae ... around the orifice of the neck of the vagina and the outlet of the urinary passage [which] receive their fluid from the female prostatae, or rather the thick membranous body around the urinary passage" ([1672], p. 107). De Graaf was the first person to name and describe the female prostate (Zaviacic, 1999, p. 17).

As the similarities between male and female bodies gave way to their differences, and semen became the sole property of the male body, the capacity of the female body to ejaculate – although still present and documented in medical writings and literature – was predominantly described as a less-than-normal occurrence.

By the nineteenth century, female fluids were linked with disease. Alexander Skene, who in 1880 identified the two ducts on each side of the urethral opening, was concerned with the problem of draining the glands and the ducts surrounding the female urethra when they became infected. The Skene glands and the urethra hence became important to the medical profession as potential sites of venereal disease and infection, and not as loci of pleasure.

The ejaculation of female fluids also came to be associated with a deviant sexual population and practice. In Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing's well-known study of sexual perversion, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, he identifies female ejaculation as the pathology of a lesbian subgroup within a deviant group – the female prison population. Under the heading of "Congenital Sexual Inversion in Women", Krafft-Ebing discusses sexual contact among women. He writes: "The intersexual gratification among ... women seems to be reduced to kissing and embraces, which seems to satisfy those of weak sexual instinct, but produces in sexually neurasthenic females ejaculation" (1965, p. 265).

According to Krafft-Ebing, ejaculation only occurs among women who suffer neurasthenia – body disturbances (or orgasms) – caused by weakness of the nervous

system. Krafft-Ebing relates female ejaculation to a nervous disability, a feature corroborated by Freud in his analysis of Dora. Freud makes a connection between Dora's hysterical symptoms and the secretion of female fluids, and links "abnormal secretions" with hysteria.

The pride taken by some women in the appearance of their genitals is quite a special feature of their vanity; and disorders of genitals which they think calculated to inspire feelings of repugnance or even disgust have an incredible power of humiliating them, of lowering their self-esteem.... An abnormal secretion of the mucous membrane of the vagina is looked upon as a source of disgust. (Freud, [1905], p. 121)

As female ejaculation was being pathologised by the medical profession, psychoanalysis and the burgeoning sexology industry, female ejaculation surfaced in Victorian male pornographic discourse. *The Pearl*, a two-volume journal of Victorian short stories, poems, letters and ballads, contains depictions of female ejaculation misinterpreted by Steven Marcus in *The Other Victorians* as "the ubiquitous projection of the male sexual fantasy onto the female response – the female response being imagined as identical with the male ... and there is the usual accompanying fantasy that they ejaculate during orgasm" (1966, p. 194)

The clearest and most complete description of the physiological process and anatomical structure of female ejaculation was published in the *International Journal of Sexology* (1950) by Ernst Gräfenberg, a German obstetrician and gynecologist. Gräfenberg observed that:

An erotic zone always could be demonstrated on the anterior wall of the vagina along the course of the urethra. ... Analogous to the male urethra, the female urethra also seems to be surrounded by erectile tissues. ... In

the course of sexual stimulation, the female urethra begins to enlarge and can be felt easily. It swells out greatly at the end of orgasm. ... Occasionally the production of fluids ... [is] profuse. ... If there is the opportunity to observe ... one can see that large quantities of a clear transparent fluid are expelled ... out of the urethra in gushes. (1950, p. 148)

Despite the descriptions of it in medical, philosophical and pornographic literature throughout Western history, and in spite of Gräfenberg's work, female ejaculation was ignored or denied by the dominant discourses – in Rancière's terms, the discourses of the police order – defining female sexuality until the 1980s. This preevental genealogy of female ejaculation had been one of discovery, disappearance and rediscovery reclaimed and popularised after the event.

Female Ejaculation: The Event⁸

What happened in the 1980s was the feminist sexual equivalent of the Apostle Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. The hysterics of Dora *et al.* converts into the politics of Bell *et al.*; the hysterical subject converts into the militant subject. While female bodies have ejaculated throughout history, Female Ejaculation was not a truth-event until it was enunciated in multiple sites of queer feminist discourse that collectively and retrospectively rendered obsolete the hegemonic markings of the female body as submissive to the pleasures and desires of the male body. As Badiou notes, "the event renders prior markings obsolete" (2003, p. 23).

Female ejaculation is an incredibly powerful experience and image of the sexual female body. To see fluid shooting with velocity and force out of the glands and ducts that surround the urethra – what is called the "urethral sponge" of the clitoris, now officially the "female prostate" – through the vaginal opening, provides a new script for female sexuality and repositions the female body as powerful, active and autonomous. Female

ejaculation educator Deborah Sundahl suggests, "[t]his is connectable to a broadening of women's social and sexual roles" (Bell, 1995, p. 273). I say, "[t]he visual image of female ejaculation relieves the phallus of its patriarchal burden" (1995, p. 273-4).

A New Female Body

The paradigm shift in knowledge about and representations of female sexuality began with *A New View of a Woman's Body* (1981), compiled by the Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers (FWHC), which in a brilliant political move redefined the clitoris, extending its visible external structure, the glans of the clitoris, to incorporate the internal spongy erectile tissue on the top and bottom vaginal walls. The FWHC named the tissue on the top wall of the vagina the "urethral sponge" and the spongy tissue on the bottom wall, the "perineal sponge" (1991, p. 43-5). During sexual excitement, the urethral and perineal sponges become engorged and erect; the paraurethral glands and ducts in the urethral sponge fill with prostatic and other fluid which can be ejaculated through the urethra. From Badiou's point of view this shift would not constitute simply a new view of a pre-existing body; rather, it would constitute a new body, something like the manner in which the church is the newly reconstituted body of Christ for Paul the Apostle.

The FWHC's *A New View of a Woman's Body* provided drawings of the clitoral structure in flaccid and erect states. These drawings make apparent the similarity in size and structure of the male and female sex organs. Directed by Mary Jane Sherfey's 1972 point-by-point comparison of clitoral and penile anatomy, the FWHC rediscovered and defined the female clitoris pragmatically through consciousness-raising sessions and shared intimate experiences which included participants taking off their clothes to compare genital anatomy and documenting each other masturbating. By doing so they acquired the practical knowledge presented in Susan Gage's now-famous anatomical illustrations of the urethral sponge of the clitoris, complete with erectile tissue and paraurethral glands and ducts (Chalker, 2000, p. 33-4).

In *The G-Spot* (1981), Alice Ladas, Beverly Whipple and John Perry extended the paradigm shift of the new view of the female body into the realm of heterosexual popular culture, coining the term "G-spot" after Gräfenberg to refer to the urethral sponge. The G-spot had wider currency than the urethral sponge as it implies a secret spot that, once located, will unleash the female body's possibilities for pleasure.

The authors describe the G-spot as "a spot inside the vagina that is extremely sensitive to deep pressure. It lies on the anterior wall of the vagina ... when properly stimulated, the Gräfenberg spot swells and leads to orgasm in many women" (1981, p. 21–2). *The G-Spot* makes two significant contributions to contemporary studies on female ejaculation: 1) it presents the female sexual organ as a unified organ, leaving behind the artificial division of the female genitals into clitoris and vagina which was so popular with Freud, Kinsey and Masters and Johnson, in which either vaginal or clitoral orgasms were privileged; and 2) it popularises female ejaculation, although it doesn't disclose how to do it.

The third key contribution – though first chronologically – to the paradigm shift in understanding and representing the female sex organ was by Josephine Sevely, who in 1978 coauthored with J. W. Bennett the first article on female ejaculation and the female prostate, "Concerning Female Ejaculation and the Female Prostate", in the *Journal of Sex Research*. Sevely and Bennett claimed that the tissue surrounding the female urethra was the same as that surrounding the male urethra and contained thirty or more prostatic glands. They also provided the lost genealogy of female ejaculation, from ancient philosophy and medicine until 1950s sexology.

Sevely extended her theories about female sexuality into *Eve's Secrets* (1987), but it never achieved the popularity of *The G-Spot*. *Eve's Secrets* emphasises the simultaneous involvement of the clitoris, urethra and vagina (the CUV) as a single integrated sex organ. The implications of this theory are twofold: first, a woman's sexual organ is viewed as an integrated whole, not split between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity; second, the

"anatomical alternative" between male and female genitals is challenged by a "new" construction of anatomical symmetry. Both female and male bodies have prostate gland structures and both have the potential to ejaculate fluids during sexual stimulation. The female body can ejaculate fluid from thirty or more ducts and with stimulation it can ejaculate repeatedly. It can ejaculate more fluid than the male body and enjoy a plurality of genital pleasure sites: the clitoris, urethra, vagina, the vaginal entrance, the top and bottom walls of the vagina and the cervix.

We now know that the female sex organ is identical to the male's in structure and function – that is, the urethral sponge is capable of anywhere from a three to eight inch erection, measures a handful in circumference, and that prostatic and other bodily fluids are ejaculated from the paraurethral glands and ducts through the urethra. What then is it that prevents recognition of body symmetry and body equality? Quite likely a large part of this lack of recognition is due to the historical invisibility of the female sex organ as an integrated unit and the subsequent lack of symmetry in our male-dominated cultures of naming, or the symbolic encoding of the female and male sex organs.

Terminology is important. Milan Zaviacic, professor of Pathology and Forensic Medicine at the Comenius University of Bratislava in Slovakia, fought for twenty years to get the International Committee on Anatomical Terminology to recognise the female prostate as a functioning anatomical structure:

It appears to be illogical to use the term prostate for the tissue in the male and a different term (Skene's glands and ducts of paraurethral glands and ducts) for the same tissue in the female. The use of the term Skene's paraurethral glands and ducts wrongly implies that some other structure rather than the prostate is involved. (Zaviacic, 1999, p. 120)

Naming is important. There are significant power differentials inherent in the naming of the female sex organ: alternately the urethral sponge, G-spot, female prostate and what I choose to name it – the female phallus.⁹

In the video *How to Female Ejaculate* (1992), Sundahl conducts a cervical self-examination. She shows the internal erection by turning the speculum sideways and inserting it inside the vagina. It is only with the turning of the speculum that the full internal and external clitoris becomes fully visible, thus also turning the female sex from the absence of "nothing to see" into the presence of "something to see". The speculum, a technology developed by gynecologists to facilitate viewing of the cervix, simultaneously exposes the neck of the womb and obscures the female phallus. That is, until it is turned. The feminist turn of the technology for viewing a woman's sex generates a whole new truth of the female body, a whole new female body.

Something to See: Making the Unseen Visible

Lying down on the floor, my cunt elevated on a plush red pillow, I turned the speculum sideways and slipped it inside. Tejal, the stunningly handsome boy/girl host, illuminated my erection with a flashlight as the twenty or so Mumbai dykes, femmes and transmen looked at what was once "nothing to see". Some slipped on a surgical glove and slid a couple of fingers inside to stimulate my swelling hardness. The consensus was that although everyone had previously felt the female phallus in full and partial fisting activities, its visual magnitude had previously remained invisible.

The visibility of the internal erection repositions the top wall of the vagina, specifically the spongy erectile tissue and the glands and ducts surrounding the urethra, as a female phallus. It turns out that the phantom female cock haunting psychoanalysis is an actual cock; Freud's little girls' so-called hallucinations were actually body-knowledge of the presence of a real penis, always already there, awaiting the appropriate technology and action – a turned speculum – to come into view.

Female Ejaculation Dissensus in Consensus

If you Google female ejaculation, as I just did on 1 March, 2014, approximately 7,350,000 results come up. I always argued that once female ejaculation entered queer feminist discourse, its knowledge would never be lost again and indeed it hasn't been. What I did not foresee was the appropriation of female ejaculation into dominant heterophallic discourses reinforcing a "male-centered, heteronormative model of human sexuality" (Chalker, 2000, p. 14).

On the one hand, there is something magnificent and fantastic about the virtual explosion of ejaculation knowledge; however, perhaps in much of this knowledge, fidelity to the pure power of female ejaculation is missing, especially if female ejaculation is presented as something one can make woman do and/or a sexual act that enhances the desire of the other. MacKinnon contends: "Anything women have claimed as their own – motherhood, athletics, traditional men's jobs, lesbianism, feminism – is made specifically sexy, dangerous, provocative, punished, made men's in pornography" (1989, pp.138–9), and I would add, in sexology. At one end of this male-stream continuum are males who demand ejaculation in their face as evidence of a hot sexual encounter. At the other extreme are those who have "emotional issues" with ejaculation – they can't stand the mess, odor or power. Male sexologists busy themselves with analysing the fluid, inventing gadgets for sighting the erect urethral sponge, producing cross-sections of the urethral glands and its ducts and rediscovering the female prostate.

Pornography and sexology sites of knowledge tend to be heterophallic, diminishing female ejaculation by portraying it as yet another activity that the female body can engage in for the exotic spectacle and pleasure of her real or cyber male partners, and, moreover, as something that the in-the-know man should be able to "facilitate" in his partner. As sociologist Ken Plummer points out, "[m]ost stories that 'take off' in a culture do so because they slot easily into the most accepted narratives of that society: the dominant ideological code" (1995, p. 115).

In Rancière's terms, the "logic of *arkhê*" re-solidifies; politics is reduced to consensus when female ejaculation is encoded inside old representative regimes. Yet the fluid beauty and power of female ejaculation ruptures the representative regime in which it has been positioned. In any porn or sexology site there is a *dissensus*, a conflict between the sensory ejaculating female body and that particular regime's way of making sense of it; "a conflict between *sense* and *sense*" (Rancière, 2010, p. 139, original emphasis). Extreme sex site FuckingMachines.com, for example, makes this blatantly obvious. On the one hand, you have the opening blurb:

Fucking Machines is machines fucking squirting pussies with extreme insertions.

FuckingMachines.com is where you'll find women fucked by huge dildos strapped to sex machines that fuck hard, featuring real female orgasms and girls squirting cum. Hardcore machine fucking guarantees that hot girls get off, with custom built sex machines designed for one purpose: to make women cum hard. Experienced porn star sluts and first time girls get fucked by robotic sex machines and hard cock on camera in high definition with downloads or streaming video at speeds up to 350 RPM. (Kink.com, 2013)

On the other hand, the site exposes the campiness of hegemonic porn discourse by stating that it is "the machines [that] fuck the squirt right out of the girls pussies". Squirt Olympics star Sindee Jennings "cums a rocket streams of squirt and over 10-feet shot" and every machine is "at full speed" (Kink.com, 2009). There is not a little hot irony in women talking dirty to steel: "Fuck, fuck, bastard, shit, fuck me". Oddly, the absence of the carbon-based, prone-to-malfunction male porn prop goes practically unnoticed. The women's performance, however, is record setting: the top squirt distance is 16 feet, speed is determined by how long the contestant can keep the hyper-metal machine stars

going at full throttle, 350 RPM, before expulsion, and at the ejaculate filling-station women have one minute to fill a pint (Kink.com, 2009).

The action-image of female ejaculation is a spectacular rupturing of almost any hegemonic porn discourse in which it is located, producing a conflict between sensory regimes – that is, between representation grounded in the hegemonic “logic of *arkhê*” and the aesthetic regime of politics that makes visible a new truth, in this case, a new truth about what a female body can do. This “rupture in the relationship between *sense* and *sense*” – between what is enacted and what is seen, “between what is seen and what is thought, and between what is thought and what is felt” (Rancière, 2010, p. 143) (porn viewer thought: she is doing it for me) – is so pronounced that, I would argue, female ejaculation – shooting hot sticky liquid out of the glands and ducts that surround one’s urethra, through the urethra, with great velocity, again and again and again, trumping the male body again and again, hyperdeflating the prized male money shot in porn, flooding the image market with female fluid –breaks any “regime of meaning” (Rancière, 2010, p. 144) in which it finds itself. The very sight of female ejaculation puts sexuated male and female bodies at risk: corporeal bodies of multiple genders have the same erectile and ejaculatory capacities.

Appendix I: Female Ejaculation Event 1988-2012

Film: Fatale Video, *Clips* (1988); Kath Daymond, *Nice Girls Don’t Do It* (1989/90); Fatale Video, *How to Female Ejaculate* (1992); Annie Sprinkle, *Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop* (1992); House of Chicks (Dorrie Lane), *The Magic of Female Ejaculation* (1992); Deborah Sundahl, *Tantric Journey to Female Ejaculation: Unveiling the G-Spot and Female Ejaculation* (1998); Deborah Sundahl, *Female Ejaculation for Couples* (2004); Deborah Sundahl, *Female Ejaculation: The Workshop* (2009); Deborah Sundahl, *Female Ejaculation: The Lecture* (2012); and Gilles Boyon and Segolene Hanotiaux, *G Spotting: A Story of Pleasure and Promise* [documentary featuring workshop with Shannon Bell] (2011), screened at the International Documentary Film Festival, November 2012. Audio: CBC

radio, *Ideas*, "One Sex or Two?" (1995). Print: I have published articles and pictures in a number of porn magazines: *Rites* (1989); *Bad Attitudes* (1992); *Lickerish* (1993); *Cupido* (1990); *Spectator* (1991); *Adam* (1992); *Over Forty* (2000). I have written performative essays in popular culture books: Arthur Kroker and Marilousie Kroker (eds), *The Hysterical Male* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1991); Shannon Bell, 1995. *Whore Carnival* (New York: Autonomedia, 1995); and Chapter Two of Lisa Johnson (ed.), *Jane Sexes It Up: True Confessions of Feminist Desire* (New York: Seal Press, 2002); "The Female Phallus: Something to See" in Shannon Bell, *Fast Feminism* (New York: Autonomedia, 2010). Deborah Sundahl addressed a number of questions concerning female ejaculation in her advice column "Ask Fanny", which featured in *On Our Backs* throughout the early to mid 1990s. She continues to address female ejaculation questions on her website, www.isismedia.org. In 2003, Sundahl wrote *Female Ejaculation and the G-Spot* (Alameda, CA: Hunter House Inc.); the classic text on female ejaculation. It is a beautiful mesh of female ejaculation knowledge combined with a practical approach to disseminating the skills of female ejaculation, including excellent instructions both for the ejaculator and her partners. It also has an extensive, up-to-date database of research documenting practically everything ever produced on female ejaculation. Furthermore, it is written by a woman who has over twenty years of practical experience teaching other women how to female ejaculate.

Notes

¹ Thank-you to Gad Horowitz for his expert editing skills and turns of theoretical phrase, and to Raan Matalon for assisting in theorising aspects of Badiou and Rancière's work.

² E.g. Female Ejaculation and The G-Spot Workshop with Shannon Bell at Come As You Are. The workshop focuses on demonstrating the extreme power and technique of female ejaculation in a safe and fun atmosphere. This popular workshop begins with a live demonstration followed by a fast female ejaculation genealogy. It concludes with anatomy, step-by-step instructions, positions, toys, communication between partners as well as answer any participant's questions.

- ³ This article was reprinted as "Feminist Ejaculations" in Kroker and Kroker (1991); "Female Ejaculation—A Woman's Ejaculation Guide," *Spectator* 26(24) 1991; and "Kvinner spruter de også! —Hvordan ejakulere?," in *Cupido* 4 of 1990.
- ⁴ This originally appeared as a monologue in the video *Nice Girls Don't Do It* and was first published as "The Everywoman's Guide to Ejaculation" in *Rites* 5(9) for 19 March 1989.
- ⁵ The earliest feminist representation of female ejaculation was part of a larger lesbian erotic film, *Clips*, produced by Blush Entertainment Group (1988).
- ⁶ This section is developed from Chapter Two, "The Female Phallus: Something to See," of my book *Fast Feminism* (New York: Autonomedia, 2010), pp. 48-53.
- ⁷ Thomas Laqueur, featured in *Ideas* (1995). Laqueur is the author of *Making Sex: Body and Gender From The Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990).
- ⁸ This section is developed from "The Female Phallus: Something to See", Chapter Two of my book *Fast Feminism* (2010), pp. 53–6.
- ⁹ The female phallus is a different story. See Chapter Two of my book *Fast Feminism*, "The Female Phallus: Something to See" (2010, pp.53–6).

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Soma rhei, or the New Vision of Porn

Tomasz Kaliściak, Tomasz Sikora

We are all libidos that are too viscous and too fluid.
(Deleuze and Guattari 67)

Each of us is fluid locked up in a fixed form.
(SUKA OFF, personal communication)

NOTE: We would like to thank the SUKA OFF artists for permission to use stills from Carnal Fluidity to illustrate our essay. Given the fact that the movie is hardly summarizable in narrative terms and works mostly through the (highly fluid) visual medium, we felt that the images would do a much better job in conveying the film's (or individual scenes') impact than any contorted description would. The artists were also kind enough to answer a few questions for us; quotes from their responses are followed in the text by the acronym AS = the artists' statement.

During the 1990s "fluidity" became a postmodern catchword. For Zygmunt Bauman, for instance, the state of permanent liquidity defines the late, consumerist stage of modernity (Bauman *passim*). For numerous feminist, gender and queer authors, on the other hand, the (arguably liberating) concept of fluidity opened up new spaces for theorizing the end of fixed and stable bodies, genders, sexualities and identities. Related aspects of corporeality – such as Bakhtin's incomplete and grotesque bodies, Kristeva's "abject" – have been elaborated on quite extensively. Is it still possible to talk about fluidity without either repeating the hackneyed clichés or else dismissing the "postmodern follies" from, say, a sober Marxist position? As some might want to argue, the liberating capacities of the fluidity metaphor, if any, have reached their limits and at the end of the day it has proven to do little more than buy into the capitalistic logic that "liquidates" stable structures and leaves us vulnerable to a neoliberal re-modelling of socio-political relations. Others, however – including, notably, the editors of this issue of *InterAlia* – criticize the "fluidification project" for not being *radical* enough, for giving in to a resolidification and hygienicization of the

corporeal, and for conforming to (however reconfigured or, indeed, fluidified) norms of propriety. Further explorations of the body's materiality promise to re-fluidify queer thinking and promote a "mucosal, suppurative and leaky ontology" (as the editors of this issue have put it). One would also want to hope that the dematerializing liquidity brought about by capitalism could be countered by the rematerializing effect of a corporeal imaginary that resists hygienicization, re-appropriation and functionalization. Thus, in the most general terms, it would be a plea for a *materiality without reification*.

* * *

To be sure, life is in many ways a matter of hydraulics. It consists in a regulation of flows, a circulation of matter. It requires (relatively) solid structures that contain, expel and exchange fluids. At a basic level, an organism may easily be envisaged as a tube or pipe – equipped with ever more sophisticated filtering systems – through which matter flows and gets processed or metabolized, "captured", as it were, and forced to yield its energy potential to the metabolizing entity concerned with its own self-preservation. In a Freudian framework, this intestinal tube would be an illustration of a sophisticated (if purposeless) "detour" from the ground level of "unlife" (cf. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Life depends on the functionalization of (essentially fluid or at least fluidifiable) matter: it is a technology that hinders and deflects material flows. The filtering, immunological mechanisms are of crucial importance: they discriminate, select, and assimilate whatever the organic structure finds proper or eliminate that which is improper.

Arguably, only an ontology that presupposes functional, closed hydraulic circuits can claim to be a "leaky" ontology. (Unlike your kitchen tap, the sea cannot really "leak," though it certainly exists in a state of constant flux and exchange.) Onto-hydraulics (or the self-regulation of flows in and across the living and nonliving realms) would have to precede any specifically *leaky* (bio-)ontology one can think of. Yet a rheum-ontology (Greek *rheuma* = that which flows, flux, discharge from the body) could be posi-ted as prior even to onto-hydraulics.



* * *

Ever since Hippocrates we have known that the human body is a vessel containing a mixture of four vital fluids: blood, phlegm, bile and black bile. Depending on their humoral proportions, they determine one's appearance (skin color), temperament as well as the equilibrium between health and illness (Porter and Vigarello 308-11). According to this theory of bodily humors, stemming as it did from mythical thinking, all kinds of fluids flow constantly through the human body, get absorbed and excreted, and thus regulate the vital processes inside the human system. In effect, fluidity was tied up with life-giving energy, while human life was imagined as a flowing river.

Freud described sexual energy along similar lines; his writing, as Katherine Hayles sums it up, "is shot through with hydraulic imagery, from blockages and dams to floods and eruptions. He images the libido essentially as a *flow that must be regulated*" (30). Jean François Lyotard would take this conceptualization up in his *Libidinal Economy* in order to rethink Marx through an energetics of libidinal flows. Our own conceptual trajectory in this essay owes more to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, where political thinking is also bound up with the concept of flows (of desire, of words, of matter, of information, of capital) – flows that regulate the lives of individuals and societies: "sperm, river, drainage, inflamed genital mucus, or a stream of words that do not let themselves be coded, a libido that is too fluid, too viscous" (Deleuze and Guattari 133). In the wake of George Bataille,

who “dreamed of a society [...] of fluid exchanges and willing loss rather than a society of accumulation” (Noys), our “liquid modernity” (Bauman) seems to have adopted the Heraclitean mechanics of bodily and non-bodily fluids as one of the underlying metaphors for imagining the individual and the social. Everything flows, and so do bodies.

* * *

“Fluidity” tends to be conceptually reduced to water – that odorless, tasteless, low-viscosity, transparent liquid deemed necessary for any life to develop and maintain itself (just as liquidated money seems to form the basis of all social life in neoliberal capitalism, a universal solvent of all social relations). Yet bodily fluids are never just water: they are water-based solutions with different physical and chemical properties as well as different and complex cultural encodings. Beyond a simple division of the body’s fluids into polluting and nonpolluting ones (cf. Grosz, Kristeva), the meanings of a given fluid are often contextual and ambiguous. Urine, for instance, is commonly perceived as “unclean,” yet in folk medicine it is believed to have therapeutic effects, perhaps due to its associations with the body’s self-purifying mechanisms and its allegedly antiseptic properties. Bodily excretions function as the kind of “dirt” that is necessary to keep the body clean: the catarrh is a cognate of catharsis; sweat, menstrual blood and urine all carry the stigma of “contamination” even as they are agents of purification. (Of the various excretions only tears seem to be free from contaminating associations.) Formulaically speaking, that which purifies is not clean. And/or that which claims to be clean maintains its cleanliness only by constantly producing dirt.

* * *

Carnal Fluidity is an experimental porn film produced in 2008 by the Polish collective INSIDE FLESH established by Sylvia Lajbig and Piotr Węgrzyński, the founders of the artistic group SUKA OFF active since 1995 (*suka* means “bitch” or “slut” in Polish). The film won the main prize at the 5th Porn Film Festival in Berlin in 2010. Since then INSIDE FLESH has had a regular presence at the Berlin festival, where it continues to screen its subsequent film projects: *Possession 3* in 2011 and *Doll Reconstruction* (in the experimental porn category) along with *Possession 6* (in the fetish porn category) in 2012. *Carnal Fluidity* was also shown in Sao Paulo at the PopPorn Festival and in Poland as part of the “Pornography Laid Bare” conference (“Obnażyć pornografię!”) held in Katowice in 2011. The conference screening was followed by a discussion with the filmmakers,

during which a leading feminist critic expressed her disgust at what she called the “hectoliters of sperm” which, in her view, flooded the movie.



* * *

The “fluidity” was not meant here as a reference to “gender fluidity,” changing one’s identity in terms of sexual preferences. The man does not pretend to be a woman, nor the other way round.

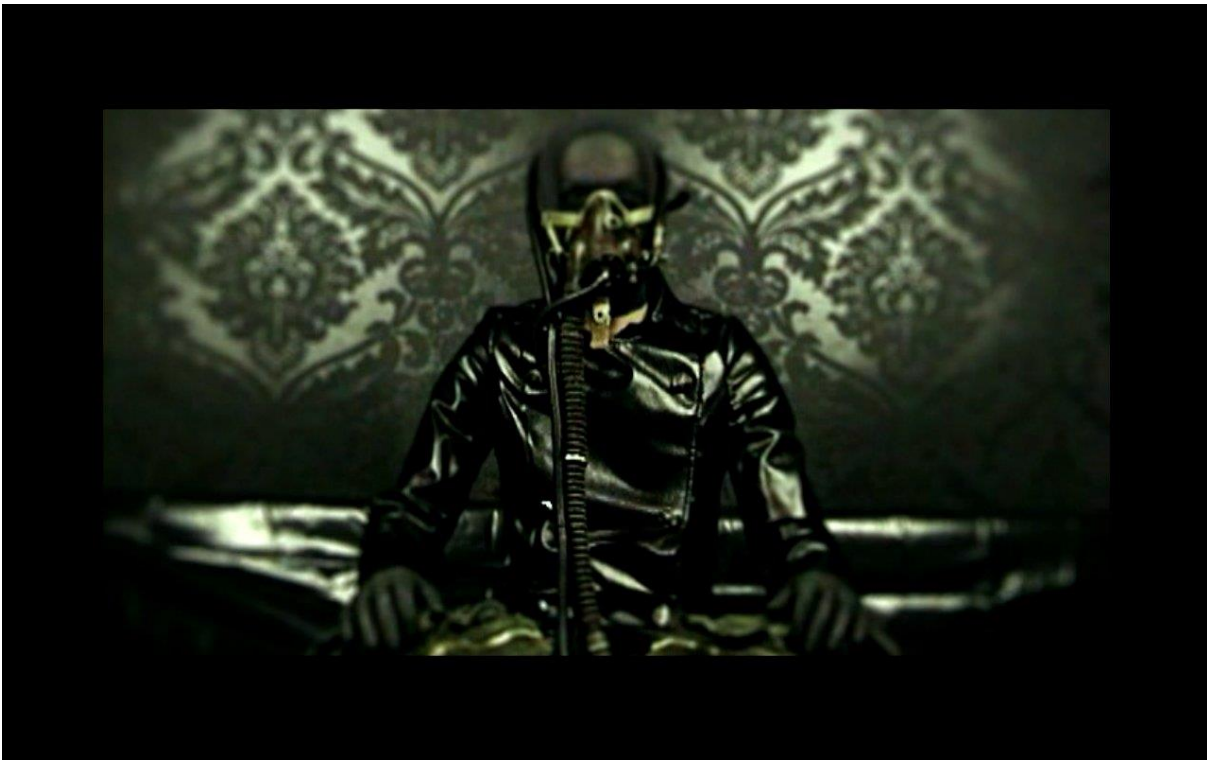
In this case, the “remote control” of the whole process is a man closed inside his uniform. His penis is part of the costume. He is not a symbol (one may look at it that way, but it’s a banal way of reading images), but a “hard” element of the mechanism. The woman, on the other hand, has more freedom, she moves across spaces, changes her appearance and her relations. She fluidifies and blurs meanings.

But I also talk about the filling up of the “vessel” of the human body with another body. This need for mutual complementation is precisely what stands behind the idea of “carnal fluidity.” (AS)

* * *

[A blurb on *Carnal Fluidity*:]

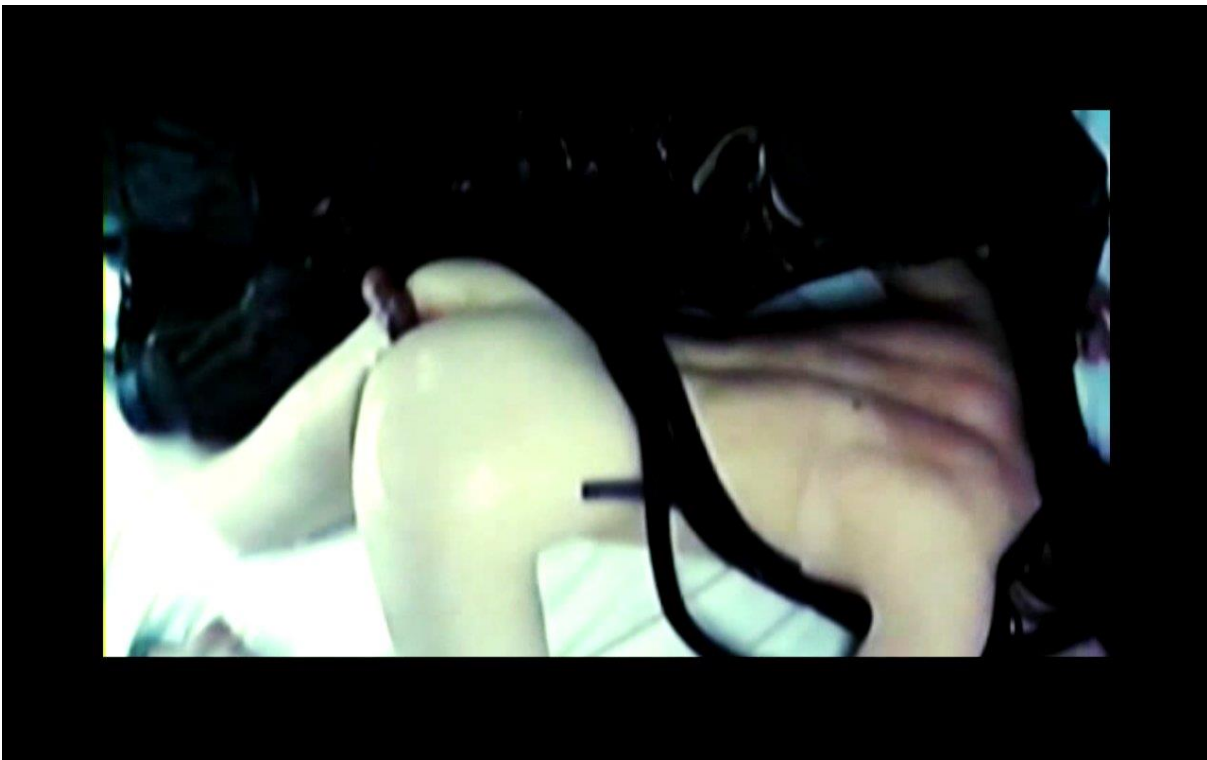
Story about the exchange of shapes, gender and space. The characters indulge themselves in ritual actions with use of modern media fetishes (TV screen and remote, photo booth) in order to satisfy their sexual needs. Their fantasies and projections (homo-, hetero- and auto-erotic in both male and female body) become real sexual acts. A postindustrial vision of isolation and loss of sexual identity. (<http://insideflesh.blogspot.com/2010/01/carnal-fluidity.html>)



* * *

The artists' comments, found in different places, may sound somewhat confusing: on the one hand, they seem to adhere to a series of organizing binaries (solidity / fluidity, hardness / softness, and – most obviously – male / female) and distance themselves from gender / sexual fluidity; but on the other, they emphasize the fluidity of their mutual relations, they speak of gender exchange and dissolution as well as "loss of sexual identity." Indeed, on its official website SUKA OFF declares that one of its goals is to "redefine the [sic] gender by blurring the individual attributes / sexual codes culturally arrogated to the male and female" (SUKA OFF website).

One way this inconsistency could be explained is that the artists – who never miss the opportunity to emphasize their “anti-ideological” stance – do not intend to deconstruct the binaries in advance, from an established theoretical position, with a preconceived goal in mind. Instead, the fluidifications and exchanges happen by and along the way, as an unpredictable effect of sexual and aesthetic experimentations. While at the beginning “man” and “woman” are simply given, through various means of communication and exchange – fantasmatic projections, sexual play, fetishes, manipulations of the visual, etc. – the cultural, if not biological, information gets de-, re- and overcoded. No longer “man and woman”, but a composite mechanism – with various elements plugged in and out – that acquires its own mode of functioning, its own ephemeral “genetic code” or operating system. Individual bodies become extensions of a monstrous machine for the production of anonymous, inhuman sex; humans are no longer in any sense “subjects” of sexual activity, but rather are themselves subject to sexual mechanical flows and pulsations.



* * *

“Hectoliters of sperm”? So be it.

The artists avoid using liquids whose possible meaning – in their view – is too limited or univocal (i.e. urine, which only connotes “excretion, rejection of something that is redundant”; AS). They

explain the use of synthetic substances in their projects – such as latex, silicone or acryl – by saying that such substances “avoid univocal interpretation” (Daultrey).

The nature of the mucous substance used in the extended bathtub scene (see some of the images dispersed throughout this essay), in fact, undecidable. Sperm or fetal fluids? Artificial or organic? What certainly draws the viewer’s attention is its growing viscosity, which renders it more and more “abject,” more and more constraining, almost suffocating (like a uniform?). Suppose it *was* sperm – wouldn’t its sheer volume contradict the heteropatriarchal economy of “sperm conservation” as opposed to the “feminine” or queer economy of dissipation and wastefulness? (Cf. Hayles 32: “[...] female sexuality has frequently been seen as autocatalytic [...] and radically nonconservative.”) This polyvalence of the substance’s possible readings may also be indicative of the excess that fluidity itself entails, unconcerned as it is with its own conservation (what is there to conserve?) even as it remains, in various ways, a necessary condition for any organism’s self-preservation. Dissociated from social and biological (re)production, the viscous liquid – through both its semantic polyvalence and its sheer volume – evokes an alternative Bataillean (an)economy of surplus and wastefulness, of fluids rubbings against solids and other fluids beyond any conceivable utility.

* * *

The bodily fluids I [we] use most are saliva, sperm and blood – probably due to the rather dynamic way in which they can change their consistency and autoproductive capacities. There is something technological about these processes, so I put them together with other “inhuman” substances that possess similar properties. They get thicker or thinner, they dry out or degrade. (AS)

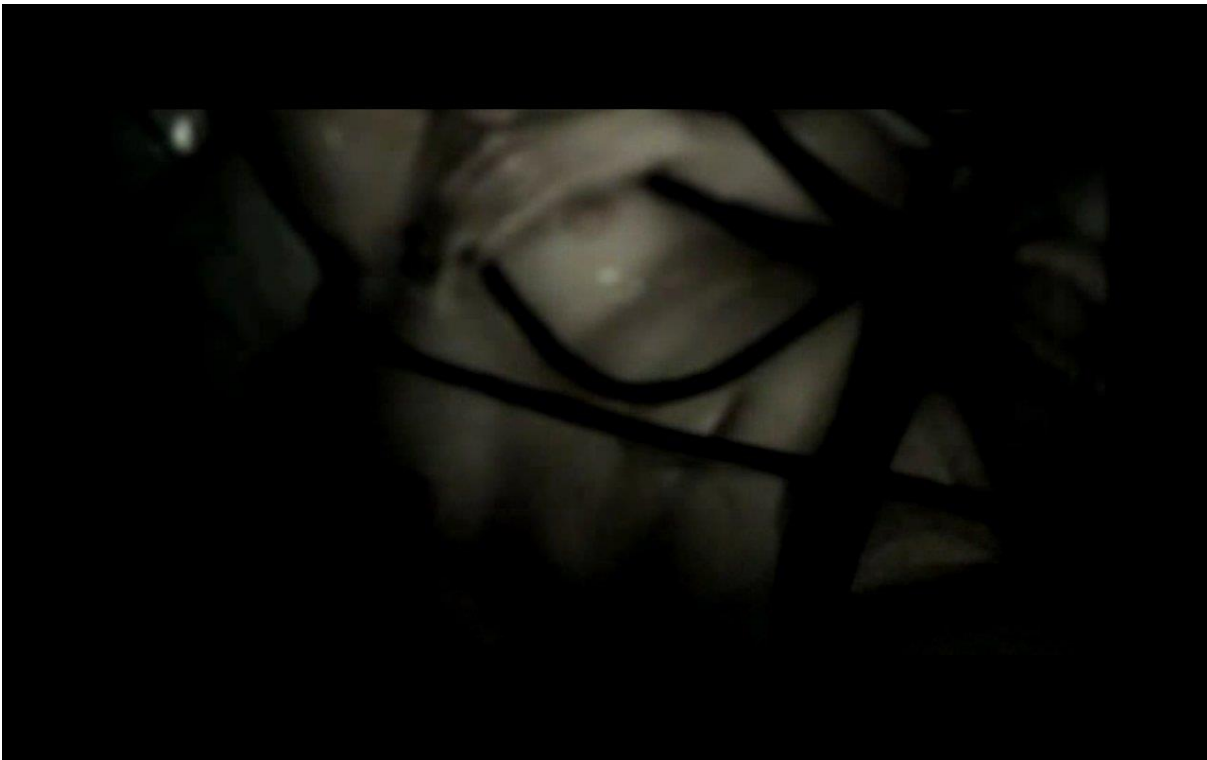
* * *

In her essay “The Mechanics of Fluids” Luce Irigaray draws on fluid mechanics on the one hand, and on Lacan’s typology of the registers of subjectivity on the other, to (re)connect the feminine with fluidity. In her view, the Lacanian Symbolic, characteristic of the phallogentric logic, is founded on the mechanics of solids, which envisages an integrated and sealed system of communicating vessels, a world of precise concepts and definitions that defends its borders and essentially reflects the Cartesian ideal of “male” rationality, which forecloses all fluidity, all leakage, all nonsystematicity. If so, the fluidity that is identified with femininity disturbs the Symbolic order and constitutes an

intervention of the Real. Feminine fluidity is a manifestation of a formless excess that cannot be contained and “pours over.”

* * *

Of course, I make the distinction between male and female fluidity, even though the quality is more commonly attributed to women. The phrase “carnal fluidity” refers metaphorically to the dissolving of information about gender, not simply in the social realm, but rather in the aesthetic one. Probably that’s where the motif of isolation and alienation, inscribed in an industrial setting, comes from. (AS)



* * *

“The new vision of porn” created by the INSIDE FLESH collective, and particularly by the film *Carnal Fluidity*, problematizes the division suggested by Irigaray. Is there a “male” fluid mechanics? Must an ejaculating penis, as shown in the final scene of the film, be always equivalent to male domination? How does the image relate to the eruptional excess, the “spilling over” associated with female fluidity? Is this male fluid – so bound up with the idea of reproduction – always more ennobled than female fluids, especially when used non-procreatively? And does the phrase “hectoliters of sperm,” in its emphasis on eruptive excess, point to male or female fluid mechanics?

Situating herself firmly within feminist studies, Irigaray undoubtedly essentializes, and in a sense even appropriates or fetishizes the notion of fluidity by ascribing it exclusively to women (lactation, menstruation, tears). At the same time, male fluidity is culturally repressed: softness and tearfulness are forced out by the imperative of being hard and stable, which Irigaray fails to notice. Male fluidity is being reclaimed in queer theory, which stresses the idea of dissolving identity rather than its consolidation (Epps 413).

* * *

The film includes scenes in which the action falls outside of direct phallic activity. These are the scenes where the actress derives pleasure from contact with the fluid essence of her own body. In the bathtub she turns into carnal mucus. This fluid or mucus (in reality fluid latex) that the woman immerses herself in looks very "carnal," like dissolved skin. The skin no longer separates the wet inside from the dry outside. The flesh is turned inside out, it dissolves in water, it becomes watery even as the water becomes fleshy (it warms and, uncannily, thickens up to the point where it acquires the quality of a "second skin," or a tight uniform). The body's viscosity is what the scene irresistibly evokes.



As Mary Douglas has observed in her commentary on Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, viscosity is an intermediary state between fluidity and solidity (79), so that it transcends the solid/ fluid opposition, and consequently the male/ female one. It is precisely viscosity – which is neither solid (male) nor fluid (female) – that turns out to be the most repulsive and dangerous. Contact with a viscous, sexually undifferentiated substance triggers primal anxiety over the dissolution/ decomposition of one's own body. Possibly what the author of the "hectoliters of sperm" comment (see above) found the most disturbing and terrifying was nothing else but viscosity: a quality shared by both fluid latex and sperm.

It seems that evoking fear or terror (not only through viscous fluids) is one of SUKA OFF's principal goals. A major focus of their artistic explorations is "the virus of violence and fear symbolized by synthetic fluids (liquid latex / acrylic paint)" (SUKA OFF website). According to the artists, the fascination with masks, uniforms, chains and other accessories that fetishize violence was an allusion to the oppressiveness associated with the activity of terrorist groups (originally the SUKA OFF collective bore the name Teatro La Terrorisma Suka Off; see "Zrzucanie skóry" 137). The idea of terror as a primal affect that manifests itself in anxiety, panic or fear, may be understood in this context, after Eagleton, in relation to the notion of sublimity as expressed in the Dionysian orgy. In Eagleton's words, Dionysus was "one of the earliest terrorist ringleaders" (2). In *Carnal Fluidity* the variously evoked terrors are tantamount to the Dionysian transposition of sexual violence into sublimity. Terror and sexual bliss have also been linked in the exegesis of Lacan's psychoanalysis offered by Slavoj Žižek, who writes of the "horrifying *jouissance*" (212) in relation to the "subject presumed to enjoy" (186). From this perspective, sexual enjoyment triggers fear in the same sense that pornography triggers a moral panic. (In 2005 SUKA OFF was charged by one of Warsaw's city councillors with publicly propagating pornography.) It is not so much the sexual intercourse – which, according to Lacan, does not exist – as the fantasy (scenario) attached to it that exposes the obscene *jouissance*: impossible and unattainable, yet persistent and necessary.

But isn't the bathtub scene, after all, subservient to the logic of a voyeuristic straight male fantasy? Or take the homoerotic scene involving the two actresses: does it really go beyond the rules of phallogocentric domination? Would a similar scene between two men have a similar meaning? Would it be possible at all for such a scene to appear in a movie created by the INSIDE FLESH collective?

* * *

Granted, the film suggests itself as a masturbatory male fantasy (locked into a frame narrative) organized around what seems like predominantly phallic imagery. It is the anonymous man in the uniform who creates and "remote controls" the settings, the female personae, the situations. The man's erect penis occupies the one static, central, regulatory position around which everything else flows and fluctuates. While the artist(s) claim(s) that the penis is just another element of the uniform, a pipe among other pipes, it is not exactly the case: the penis visually stands out and the numerous close-ups point to its privileged position. The film ends, predictably perhaps, with the man's self-induced ejaculation, thus confirming his apparent self-sufficiency and self-control as well as his master position. The impermeable, impenetrable uniform, which covers his whole body and renders him anonymous and, perhaps, cyborged, does not – or so it seems – trouble or erase the gender codings of "maleness"; instead, it lays them bare, it strips them down to the phallic core. The anonymity might rather be said to stress the universality of the Phallus. The rest of the man's body is incidental, a mere prosthesis (as is the body of one of the female characters, immobilized and stiffened with fetishistically employed medical prostheses). Far from being an individual's attribute or, worse, "capital" to be managed for the sake of maximizing pleasure (and/or power), sexuality is exposed here as the masturbatory mechanism of the (non-existent) Phallus for which variously gendered and variously empowered bodies are nothing but substitutable prostheses.

Granted, the gender positions in *Carnal Fluidity* are asymmetrical and, at least at first sight, the film does not seem to attempt to decentre the phallic imaginary that organizes the (fluid) relations between persons, objects and images. Like most straight porn, ultimately the movie revolves around a (hydraulically achieved) hardness that leads to the male ejaculation, the fluid sterily discharged onto the rubber or latex uniform.

The hardness I talk about is important in mechanical terms. Preferably, it should be accompanied by soft forms. I like all industrial-corporeal analogies. A hard penis penetrates a soft vagina, which causes the production of fluids. This sounds like a description of a technological process, doesn't it? My intention is not dehumanization, but changing the meanings and applications of the discovered processes and the fluids that accompany them. I use real objects to image unreal situations. (AS)



Having said that, however, one should also be ready to acknowledge that the universalization of the Phallus (together with the privileges customarily attached to it) becomes, in effect, the man's prison. Exactly halfway through the movie the male character tries to (partly) free himself from his hermetic confinement: he takes off his mask and cuts some of the bandages around his head to expose his mouth; hoses appear and get into his mouth and further down his body (followed by the camera). Not only is the tearing off of the mask an (unfinished) gesture towards a de-universalization and a singularized subjecthood, it also opens the man up to (molar as well as molecular) communications and penetrations. The communications take place at various levels simultaneously: it's the communication between (or across) different elements of the body, between (or across) persons, between (or across) sexes and genders, between (or across) codes and meanings. Communication flows enable assemblages to aggregate. Still, this opening up of a male body for penetration is not unconditional: anal penetration seems to remain a strong taboo in the work of the INSIDE FLESH collective: the last frontier defending and defining the "male" against the "female." The male craving for penetration is clearly present in SUKA OFF's productions, yet certain kinds of penetration remain (as yet) impermissible or at least unrepresentable.

Although phallic imagery features prominently throughout the film and may indeed claim to symbolically organize the flows of fluids, bodies, desires, genders and images, it ultimately fails to

establish a "totality" that would delegate each element to its "proper place." Rather, much as it claims to be in the position of dictating "the rules of the game," the phallic function is itself subjected to sexual play where no one is ever able to become a proper "subject." Arguably, in pornography a (liberal humanist) subject is never possible – which is perhaps why pornography remains a scandal even in "liberal" Western societies. In Lee Edelman's formulation, "[a]s a genre insistently focused on parts, it exposes, along with the private parts, the parts of ourselves incompatible with the sovereignty of the whole and so with belief in the 'private self' as the property of the subject" (32). Indeed, "the common labor of pornography and the queer is "the universal desublimation of universality against which universality first establishes itself" (Edelman 33).

As Linda Williams admits, "it is simply not possible to regard a represented penis per se as a literal instance of male dominance" (268). The cumshot – traditionally associated with a triumphant confirmation of male potency and domination, the hero's trophy – may likewise escape the dominant phallic order. Indeed, the cumshot that concludes *Carnal Fluidity* is not very convincing by the standards of the mainstream porn industry. It could be described as "weak" and "leaky," and thus "feminine" rather than "masculine." The autoeroticism of this scene is obviously autoironic, a parody of the cumshot convention. Moreover, as Calvin Thomas argues in his analysis of the "money shot," semen gets feminized simply "by virtue of being subjected to representation" or made visible (19).



Lee Edelman observes that "[in] the rigid dick the vital flow succumbs to rigor mortis, to a sort of mortification, to the solidity of what Deleuze evokes as the wall of representation or 'the statue of the father,' which immures the material flow he describes as 'a formless, nonhuman life'" (39). Yet something always escapes this mortification, some molecules of that "formless, nonhuman life" leak out and disconnect sperm from the sanctified notion of human "essence" or "spirit." As a material, viscous fluid, cum redirects us not only to the idea of "male fluidity," but, further, to the nonhuman sexless fluidity that underlies the existence of liberal humanist subjects. The conscious ego-subject, in Edelman's analysis, becomes "nothing but the largely indifferent, if necessary, adjunct" to the production of *jouissance* (38), a point that brings us back to the inhuman, machinic quality of sexual behavior in *Carnal Fluidity*.

* * *

Even though *Carnal Fluidity* does not seem to openly undermine phallocentrism, it certainly sexualizes it to the point where its claims to power dissolve in the excessive fluids, organic or artificial, which dominate the movie. Rather than claim, in the good old liberal humanist tradition, gender equality, mutual respect, partnership, tolerance for sexual difference and all that, the film adopts the strategy of a playful sexualization of existing gender/ sexual/ social relations, thus undermining their claims to "naturalness" and teasing out of them their latent potential for (ever

politically incorrect) *jouissance*. This is a “politics” akin to that of SM practices: rather than deny power differentials – however culturally constructed they may be understood to be – let us neutralize them through sexual roleplay. This is, more generally, the kind of cultural work, or cultural politics, that pornography performs. “Pornography,” as one of us has written elsewhere, “does not propose a definitive concept of the body; instead, the body remains inevitably fluid and infinitely able to reinvent itself and its capacity for pleasure.” And further:

Here is play of power before it comes to be fixed into stable social roles; before it becomes coercive, reified, and institutionalized. Even when it borrows from the grammar of violence, sex in pornographic representations remains irredeemably playful. Much of its allure comes from the fact that it shows a world without the law: the only *raison d'être* of a police(wo)man or a soldier in this world is the fetish quality of his/her dress and his/her affinity with power. Any figure appropriated from the “ordinary” world loses its “real” meaning and becomes a prop, a “false signifier” pointing not to fixed social positions, but to the pleasurable playfulness behind social existence. (Sikora)

Along somewhat similar lines, Lee Edelman proposes that pornography, like queerness, “never coincides with itself, never quickens into form” (38).



* * *

When feminism(s) or the LGBT movement(s) seek "integration" into the liberal model of "clean and proper" subjecthood, what ensues – as we have been able to observe over the last few decades – is a desexualization and decorporealization; or, more precisely, an increasingly intense regulation and disciplining of bodies, genders and sexualities – which is the price to pay for "inclusion" and "recognition."

So much depends on (the denial of) literalization.

We've have had some problems with people who take what we do on stage literally. One man in Geneva became aggressive during the 'Flesh Camp' performance [features concentration camp metaphors], because he believed that Piotr was promoting Nazism and violence against women. (Daultrey)

* * *

Baudrillard claims that porn "adds a dimension to the space of sex, it makes the latter more real than the real" (28). This surplus of reality makes the hyperreality of sex apparent and thus brings porn to the level of a simulacrum. In *Carnal Fluidity* the sexual scenes focus on exposing the mechanics, the physiology, and even the hydraulics of sex. Bodies are shown as "desiring machines" interconnected through a network of flows, hoses and pipes. Fluids serve here as lubricants, while the penis works like a piston or a pump. The pipes and hoses, inserted into the mouth, the vagina and the anus, are an extension of the ducts of the human body: the gullet, the intestines, the veins. They connect the (interior of the) body and the world, biology and technology. The pilot's mask, the bathtub, the rubber hose, the drain, the sewers, the communication channels, the corridors, the photo booth, the bathroom, the bedroom make up a system of communicating vessels where fluid bodies try to communicate with each other. The trains penetrating the subway tunnels, the penis entering the vagina, the streams of people vanishing into passageways and carriages demonstrate some sort of a fluid mechanics of the modern world, the world of Bauman's "liquid modernity." Sex is just one of many fluctuating dimensions of the hyperreal mechanism of communication.

In a world of isolated, self-contained objects no communication, and no sexuality, would be possible. Communication depends on seepage, flow and exchange.



The sexual intercourse is portrayed in the movie through the figure of the bodies' plugging in rather than uniting, as in classical porn. The bodies are plugged into each other with numerous pipes and appliances. Interestingly, they also seem to be plugged into the camera and the monitor that displays them. The figure of plugging in suggests a mutual transfusion of fluids which, importantly, connects, but does not fuse the two organisms. The exchange/ transfusion of organic fluids brings to mind a number of vital questions concerning, for instance, safety and immunology. Primarily, however, it allows us to consider bodily fluids as well as the sexual act itself in terms of gift or exchange, which renders untenable the tendency to treat pornography solely in terms of the male economy of exploitation.

As Isabelle Stengers and Didier Gille argue, "the exchange of body fluids is dangerous; it is dangerous like life itself, which does not move in a closed circle, but as an endless flowing in and out of things" (Stengers 235). Arguably, the exchange of fluids is as dangerous as sex or breathing; it triggers unpredictable immunological responses, or indeed a breakdown of the immunological defense system as a whole. This danger makes it possible to think one's life as a gift offered to

another through sex. If the gift takes the form of a fluid, then the risk arises that the life-giving gift is at the very same time a deadly poison (Dean 74-5). This is the ambivalent logic of the gift practiced in the culture of barebacking as well is in the movie created by the INSIDE FLESH collective, where sex is performed without a condom.

* * *

The movie picture is also a stream whose continuity is subjected to a variety of modifications: slow-down, speed-up, pause, rewind. The flow of the action is disturbed by various image distortions that produce a spilling or lingering effect: noise, deformation, flickering, loss of focus.



Frederic Jameson asserts that "[...] the visual is *essentially* pornographic [...]. Pornographic films are thus only the potentiation of films in general, which ask us to stare at the world as though it were a naked body" (1). It is the visual side of their work, the "visual language" – much more than its pornographic capacity to incite sexual arousal – that the artists keep emphasizing.

The key to the phrase "the new vision of porn" is the word "vision." Hypernarration in the plot structure needs dynamism in the visual realm. The films I make are not meant to sexually arouse the viewers (which is the chief aim of mainstream productions); they

are not meant to be an equivalent to any sexual activity. Well, at least not primarily :) (AS)

When watching *Carnal Fluidity*, the viewer inadvertently becomes part of another assemblage, another machine: the one that produces meanings out of the visual, out of configurations and processions of (variously prepared) images. Even though the artists distance themselves from “symbolic” readings of their works and instead emphasize the formal dimension and the visual codes, any image, any formal device, any prop is bound to be subjected to the cultural imperative of “interpretation.” On the other hand, Caroline A. Jones argues, “while we now (in our late capitalist postmodern era) ‘know’ that everything is a simulacrum, an image, a representation, we also ‘know’ that this simulacral world always leaks. Something always escapes the image” (136). Instrumentalized communication always leaks. Pornographic images in general, and SUKA OFF’s pornographic images in particular, are equally about communication possibilities and communication breakdowns. As one of us has claimed elsewhere, “through pornographic abjection the Lacanian ‘Real’ flashes through, pointing to a moment of crisis, a communication breakdown, a shameless parade of material signifiers released temporarily from the usual structures of meaning and social contracts” (Sikora).

With all due respect to the persistent and inevitable demands of hermeneutics, it is the leakages from the Symbolic that elicit visceral responses. There’s more to communication than the “official” communication channels can hold; there’s secret hydraulical exchanges, there are molecular flows that escape any subsumption to an abstract (phallic) symbol or an articulable politics.

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Bleugh!¹

Michael O'Rourke

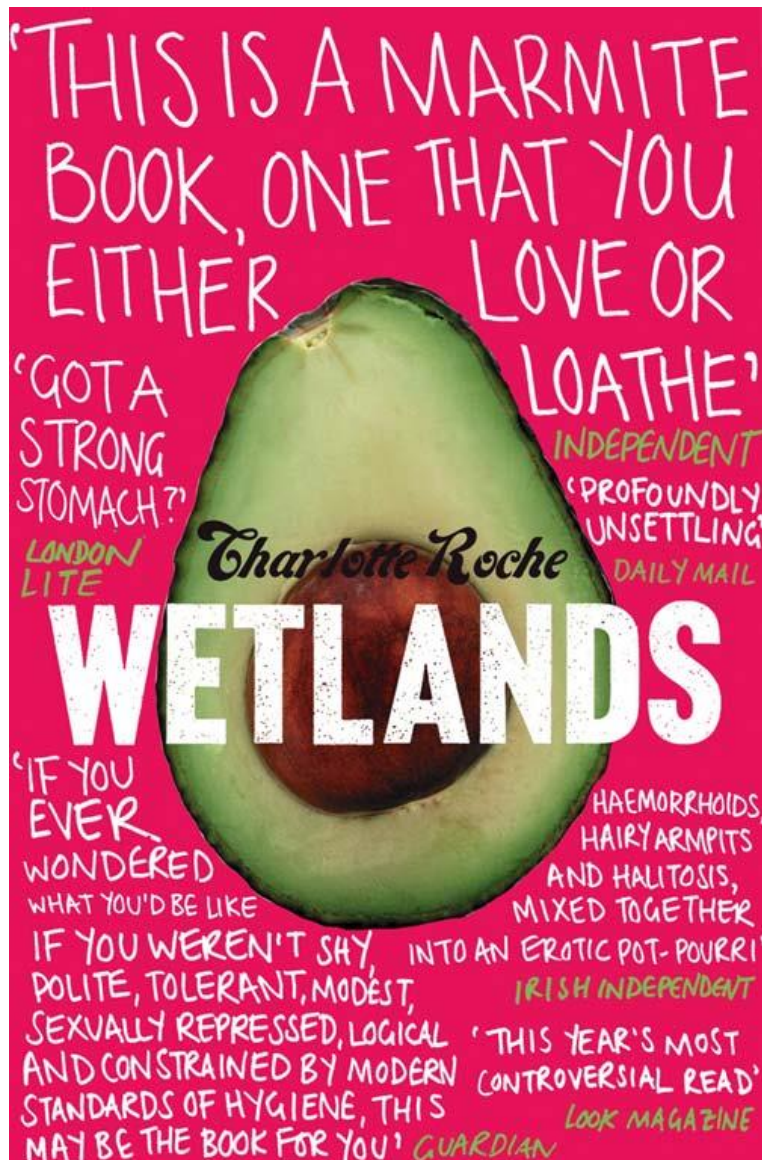
for Rebeka Pöldsam

We might need to talk about bodies, and body parts, in much more direct, precise, perhaps even crude ways².

Against Sanonormativity

Stanley Cavell asks that we "learn to maintain our disgust more easily than we learn to maintain what disgusts us"³. In this piece I launch a frontal (or rather dorsal) attack on the squeamishness (what we might call *sanonormativity*) and hygienicization (we might call it a *hygienonormativity*) of contemporary queer and feminist thinking which has little to say about (sexual) disgust (the term is Jonathan Dollimore's) and the erotics of bodily fluids and the ontologically leaky body⁴. One could mine philosophical texts, literature and film for a whole range of fluids: blood, sweat, pus, mucous, semen, milk, tears, vomit, diarrhea, saliva, bile, spinal fluid and urine among other suppurations which unsuture the neatly stoppered up body (and the very bodies of knowledge of queer and feminist theories).

My overall argument⁵ which is pitched against the domestication of queer thought—and it is apposite and serendipitous that queer and queasy share etymological roots; Jennifer Boyd has coined the wonderful and productive neologism *Queezy* which conjoins uneasy, queer, and queasy⁶—is that these bodily fluids potentialize new ways of thinking about corporeality, ontology, aesthetics and politics and that, as Derrida would argue, the worst is yet to-come. And that is a good thing. One might expect the proper (or improper) names of Georges Bataille and Julia Kristeva to be the main figures indexed in this project. But my archive will be Derrida, Heidegger, Lacan, and Freud and my focus, for this short piece, will be on the novel *Wetlands* written by Charlotte Roche (published in German as *Feuchtgebiete* in 2008 and the subject of a recent film)⁷.



<https://thejacketmuseum.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/wetlands.jpg>

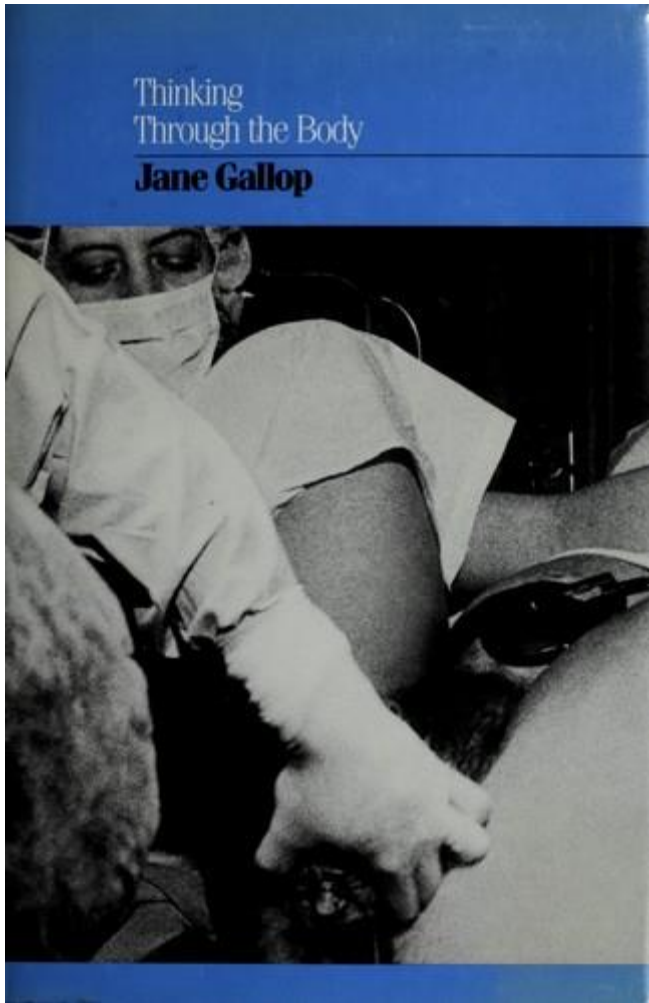
See Jane Run

Justin E. H. Smith wrote of Roche's novel in a review in *N+1*: "If Roche has hit on something true and heretofore unsaid, it is the insight that to write about bodily fluids is not to describe something exceptional in the course of human life. It is, rather, to describe something that is always there and always felt to be there, through all those other things people do and experience at that level that used to be the subject of novels (falling in love, challenging others to duels, talking about the buying and selling of land, etc)"⁸.



<http://forbookssake.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Charlotte-Roche.jpg>

I want to ask what kind of a reading practice Charlotte Roche's *Wetlands* invites from us as we ponder the legacies of feminism and queer theory and their ongoing possibilities for generating fluid futures that one might want to hold on to? One possible mode of reading this book makes a space for is *galloping*, a kind of close reading which would mime a propulsive and undoubtedly queasy movement of the body, a body that is thinking and moving and unsettled; this jolting movement would be operative at the level of the narrative itself: it "turns out your butt hole is always in motion" muses Helen Memel, the protagonist of this novel, whose remappings of bio-cartography and the (dis)gustatory set the stage for a revisiting of the politics and ontology of the body. *Galloping as reading* would mean a fluid kind of thinking and writing, a *scatogrammatology*. Of course, you might hear a glancing reference to Jane Gallop's *Thinking Through the Body* which has its own chapter on anality⁹.



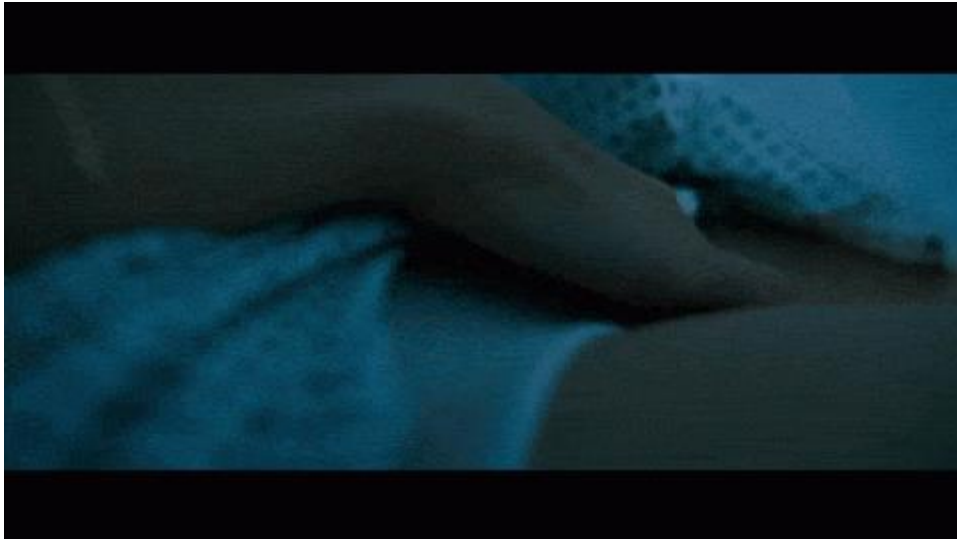
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That chapter "The Anal Body" has a title which in its own condensed fashion might aptly describe the way Helen's body in this novel becomes a rubiks cube where all the orifices and erogenous zones of the body get swept up in the metonymic folds of the anus, Helen's is an *anal body*. The novel is also set in a hospital so the cover of Gallop's book could easily double as a jacket for Roche's which is nothing but a thinking through and out of the body.



<http://boomstickcomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/wetlands-1.jpg>

In a more recent essay Gallop makes a brief but nonetheless telling remark about Leo Bersani's book *The Freudian Body* (a text written some while before the now *ür*-text on anality, his essay "Is The Rectum a Grave?")¹⁰. That remark is that Bersani is a "fucking tease!"¹¹ I am not disinclined to agree with this assessment; after all, what is wrong with reading as teasing? Reading as flirting? Isn't that really what Bersani means by cruising as depersonalization anyway? (I have a companion text to this one, "Peri-Aesthetics" in which I lay out three new critical modes: rimming, cruising and fisting. I would now be tempted to add teasing and flirting¹²). The import of Gallop's as-ever close reading (nobody reads more closely) of Bersani's book is that not once does he mention the phrase "The Freudian Body". This is hardly an insignificant omission. And what Gallop teaches us, as she runs along, is that attending to moments like these is what opens up the future of reading as such. Finding a hole like this in Bersani's thesis about the Freudian body puts the brakes on for us (not quite in the same way Helen puts the brakes of the bed on in *Wetlands*¹³) and gives us pause. We put the skids on here and try to re-mark (about) this textual lacuna. So galloping as reading, the practice I'm adhering to here as we stick with the text, is as much about *reversing* as stalling and pressing on. We need to back up a little. So I want to say, up front (Helen would say from the top) that the news from the front about anality is that we need to go back to Freud, to the Freudian body and then to Lacan. I am doing everything in reverse.



http://38.media.tumblr.com/e412a88c947211cb7b4d9790ff9ef3f9/tumblr_nam7fkfi0e1tfbpzso1_500.gif

Helen's Freudian Body

The backdrop to my reading of *Wetlands* is Eve Sedgwick's writing on anal eroticism which in large measure put an end to the critical silence (another hole in discourse) about *female anal eroticism*. Despite the fact that Eve's most famous essays on anality are on men (or about texts by men, Henry James most memorably) it is in an essay such as "A Poem is Being Written" where she confronts her own anal auto-eroticism that Sedgwick opens up an avenue for thinking and talking about female anal *jouissance* (and in many ways her notorious essay "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl" was the proscenium for all critical attentions to the equally silenced topic of female autoeroticism. Fingering would be another peri-critical mode)¹⁴.



http://static.rogerebert.com/uploads/movie/movie_poster/wetlands-2014/large_Screen_Shot_2014-09-02_at_2.02.08_PM.png

Yet, despite this ever so generous attention to female anal autoerotic pleasures it is inescapable that, for Eve, whatever way you look at it, the focus is almost always on the ass as indicatively male, contributing to the in her own words “prior and entire exclusion of women from the general population of desirers, desirees, anus-possessioners and even readers”¹⁵. In a posthumously published essay “Anality: News from the Front”, which I have already obliquely referenced, she worries over the way recent writing on male anality and barebacking sex covers over female anality and the pleasures and dangers it brings. It seems then that for Eve, and I am trying not to be ungenerous about it, that the female anus can only be discussed on the back of the male one (she even admits that she doesn’t mind, in fact some of her favourite scenes, *don’t* include women).

Another text that forms an important backdrop for my reading of *Wetlands* is Judith Butler’s “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary” in which the phallus, specifically the Lacanian phallus-as-transcendental signifier, is given a metonymical shove so that it can index *any* part of the body¹⁶. The whole body becomes a series of erogenous nodes and zones which challenges us to rethink what is sexual and what is erotic. Helen’s Freudian body which leaks and spurts from

every possible pore and orifice in this text does precisely that. So, we need to go back to Freud whose *Three Essays on Sexuality* paved the way for the Lacanian Real's destabilizations of sexuality, an unsettling of eroto-socio-sexual categories which lies in its de-essentializing and de-specifying abstractness (Sedgwick's axioms in *Epistemology of the Closet* do the same kind of slippery work)¹⁷. What is clear from Freud's three essays is that normative (hetero)sexuality derails the constitutive perversion which is the undertow of so-called normal sexuality. The desired shift toward reproductive heterosexuality—which eighteen year old Helen will never make, especially since she has been sterilized—is always bought by overcoming, sublimating or ejecting (a vomiting out) polymorphous perversity. This is a polymorphousness which Helen never fails to hang on to and it is hardly a spectre in Roche's novel, hovering like some lost state of plenitude to be mourned; rather perversion is primary, even constitutive as we shall see. Sedgwick writes in *Tendencies* that "sexuality" in the sense of the "open mesh of possibilities" can "*only* mean queer sexuality". And it is inescapable that sexuality can *only ever mean* queer sexuality for Helen¹⁸.

What Freud and Sedgwick are getting at is the subtle point that desire itself is anti(hetero)normative, inassimilable to the ego and unattachable to the person as such. Desire is fundamentally impersonal or depersonal and this concerns a way of thinking about how desire does not relate to or figure the face (this is a drive by reference to Giorgio Agamben's exhortation that we "be only" our face which I have elsewhere rewritten as "be only your anus")¹⁹. In this depersonification of desire which reveals its originary perverse force we witness Paul de Man's "defacement" or defiguration²⁰. If desire does not work by *prosopopoeia*—the trope whereby we *give face*—then we have to reconsider libidinal investments in both the auto- and allo-erotic registers (in *Wetlands* it is mostly, but not always, auto-erotic which at least partially negates the question about the other's alterity "in the face" of im- or de-personal desire).



<https://projectormagazine.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/gaothtw9jkwkvre9gb9ep1zsr.jpg?w=610&h=343>

Galloping along too quickly we can say then that Lacan's Real which designates that which is stubbornly inassimilable, unincorporable, inappropriable or symbolizable reveals how the unsettling kernel—*pace* Žižek— of sex is its inherent perversion²¹. That is to say that normative (hetero)sexuality is already fissured, *cut*, incised from within and the *objet a* does not cling to either a person or a thing: the *objet a* itself is exappropriative, multiplicitous and promiscuously adheres to heterogeneous possibilities for desire and this does not always, as Sedgwick would be quick to point out, cleave to gender (or indeed genitality) at all. Among her axioms in *Epistemology of the Closet* we have: "Some people, homo-, hetero-, and bisexual, experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not"²². And, for *Wetlands'* Helen the *objet a* can just as easily be a showerhead or an eyelash curling tongs than another person. Going back to Freud: in the *Three Essays* he addresses this excess that Lacan will later call the *objet a* in terms of polymorphous perversity, a capaciousness which emphasizes the infant's (or anyone's) capacity to confer autoerotic pleasure on any number of bodily openings, corporeal apertures, surfaces, scenes and activities. Lacan goes back to Freud's holes:

the very delimitation of the 'erogenous zone' that the drive isolates from the metabolism of the function ... is the result of a cut expressed in the anatomical mark of a margin or border—lips, 'the enclosure of the teeth', the rim of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the slit formed by the eyelids, even the horn-shaped aperture of the ear ... Observe that this mark of the cut is no less obviously present in the object described by analytic theory: the mamilla, the faeces, the phallus (imaginary object), the urinary flow (an unthinkable list, if one adds, as I do, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice—the nothing²³).

Lacan is above, we might say, describing Helen's body as multiple erogenous fields. Tellingly, Lacan places the mark of the cut in objects and for Freud the child re-members acts of loss later on. The novel begins, of course, with a cut, the intimate shaving accident which slices through her haemorrhoid, a cut which is redoubled by the cut of the doctor who fillets open her anus when removing the infected anal tissue (which she will go on to ingest and reincorporate and, of course, she carves the wound open a third time on the brakes of the bed). But the cuts in and on Helen's body go far beyond this originary one. Among the many erogenous zones are her eyelids and lashes, her ears (which she pushes the cotton buds into to derive maximal eroto-sensual pleasure, an *oto-eroticism*), her fingertips, her vagina, her anus, her tear ducts, her nasal cavity, her every pore. Helen confers erotic meaning on just about every surface of her body, and on just about every aperture. Equally, she endows erotic plentitude on that which is expelled or excorporated from the body: her piss, tears, faeces, menstrual blood, shit, boogers, blackheads, and so on.



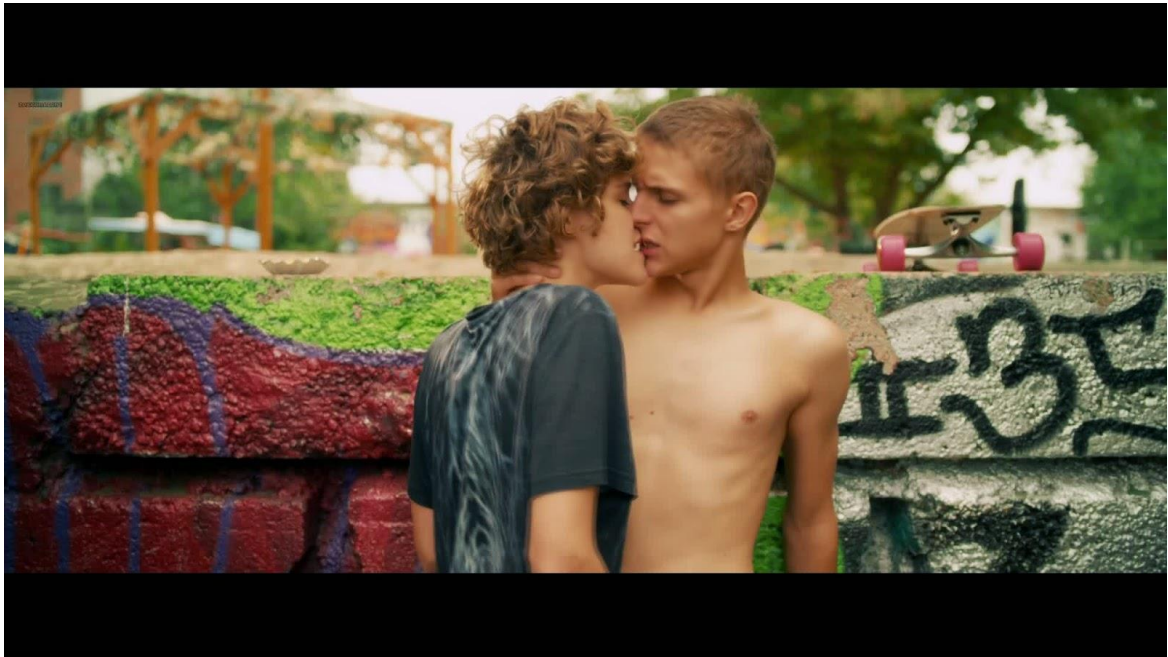
<http://i.imgur.com/FW8HBde.jpg>

What Helen makes explicit is that for Freud and later for Lacan erogenous zones come into being when sexuality is severed from any organicity, when the cut occasions the moment of autoeroticism (actually there isn't very much sex in the novel of *Wetlands* and the vast proportion of the sexual scenes are indeed autoerotic ones but usually they involve bodily borders and apertures which we wouldn't normally think of as erotic hotspots). For Freud and Lacan and clearly for Helen these "marks of the cut" which create *objets a* are multiplied throughout and across the body. Sexual desire originates in autoeroticism then, but more crucially, it is often not attached to (or is detachable from) the genital organs. But Helen's eyes, ears, nose remain no less erotogenic *for not being* erotogenic, because what Roche shows us is that nongenital parts of the body can behave *exactly* like genital organs.

In uncoupling genitality and erotogenicity (as well as genitality and organic function) as Freud and Roche demonstrate, as Butler does with the lesbian phallus, that there is an irreducibility and a metonymical slippage between gender and sexuality. As Tim Dean reminds us Lacan follows Freud in deprivileging genitality and suggests that the mouth is a model for all other erogenous zones²⁴. Lacan suggests that, at least from a psychoanalytic point of view, the body is covered in mouths. We can extrapolate from this that any and all "marks of the cut", those bodily openings where inside meets outside, are extendable to any and all bodily openings, endlessly re(sh)iterable. Every

hole—big or small—in Helen's body, every pore which breathes, absorbs, excretes, expels—becomes one of Freud and Lacan's many mouths. Or, better still, one of Lacan's many anuses (we could then begin to talk about the anal gaze, the anal voice and so on too).

In understanding kissing as perverse it is Freud who suggests that the anal zone is comparable to the mouth since the tongue leads to the gullet down to the alimentary canal and ultimately to the organ of expulsion. We are, for Freud, when we kiss, eating the other's shit, their waste.



<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/->

[igyRaHJ29K4/U7QZsIOIk8I/AAAAAAAAAR3M/E4XVu7gTjWg/s1600/Wetlands+5.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-igyRaHJ29K4/U7QZsIOIk8I/AAAAAAAAAR3M/E4XVu7gTjWg/s1600/Wetlands+5.jpg)

Helen's anal body displays a number of assholes, in that every opening figures an anal cut, at its surface and this anal integument—the skin as one elasticized erogenous zone—brings us back to Gallop and her anal body. In the *Three Essays*, again, Freud outlines how shit as *objet a* unhooks the phallus-as-transcendental signifier "the contents of the bowels, which act as a stimulating mass upon a sexually sensitive portion of mucous membrane, behave like forerunners of another organ, which is destined to come into action after the phase of childhood ... the retention of the faecal mass is thus carried out intentionally by the child to begin with, in order to serve, as it were, as a masturbatory stimulus upon the anal zone"²⁵.

The phallus in this Freudo-Lacanian scenography gets displaced and comes to figure for and as shit (or any other waste/ob-jects which the body ab-jects [literally to throw out]) and Helen spends quite a lot of the novel holding her crap in or retaining blood or cum in her pussy. This is hardly surprising given the physico-anatomical proximity of these genital regions. In terms of this substitutability we might think of Helen's daydream about the guy who has an impressive "log of crap" dangling from his ass but when he turns around it is his cock from the front; or maybe it is both). But, most queasy making I think, is that Freud and Lacan perform what Tim Dean terms (a critical, psychoanalytical) *reverse money shot*²⁶. It is not the phallus as a figure for the penis after all, but rather the phallus gets re-figured as shit and Helen's neologism "anal piss" captures this reversal quite beautifully.

Queer Theory's () hole complex

In the Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani's theory-fiction *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* he decenters the Heideggerian topology of the earth by developing what he calls the () hole complex. This model is a way in which to grasp the earth not as a solid Whole but rather as a "destituted whole" and a "holey-mess". The () hole complex is "the zone through which the Outside gradually but persistently emerges, creeps in (or out?) from the Inside"²⁷. The earth becomes an insurgent, holey, writhing mess. When the solidity of the earth is inverted by the tellurian insurgency of lube (here he means oil), the holes that emerge are polytical: "for every inconsistency on the surface, there is a subterranean consistency"²⁸, a confusion of solid and void.

What I want to call Queer Theory's () hole complex would be an ungrounding, desolidifying, deprivileging and destabilization of the intact, Whole body. Revealing the () hole complex of the body is to expose the leaky ontology of a body which is porous, soggy, fluid, craps out. Negarestani writes: "things leak out according to a logic that does not belong to us"²⁹, the logic of *durchfall*, which in Heidegger's *Being and Time* can mean falling or diarrhea. But Negarestani's () hole complex depends on what he calls "nested interiorities", the ways in which the outside gradually but persistently emerges from the inside or creeps in (or out?) from the inside. And I think we can find an example of this queered () hole complex in Dean's formulation of what he calls the "reverse money shot".

Heideggerian *Durchfall*

Disgust-aversion and scatontological anxiety are ubiquitous in philosophical discourse but nonetheless unavoidable³⁰. Even that wild thinker François Laruelle describes the “obscenities of philosophy” as follows:

Inebriated and bastardized by Plato, over heated, over thought, liquified by Descartes, moralized by Kant, whipped by Sade, devoured by Hegel, disgorged by Stirner, conscripted by Husserl, chewed over by Nietzsche, down the wrong pipe of Derrida, flipped over by Heidegger, crapped out by Deleuze, thrown up by Laruelle. And it would come back for more, if we let it!

Clearly Laruelle cannot stomach the philosophy crapped out by Deleuze into his mouth—it having been in the mouths or anuses of ten men before him—and expels it. But Laruelle’s attempt to move beyond philosophy’s coprological excesses necessarily fails since it can always come back for more. And the most obscene thing we can do is to just “let it”, to give ourselves over to scat-isfactory expulsions, precipitate into *durchfall* and “fully embrace the powers of ordure”³¹.



<http://www.vice.com/read/the-philosophy-of-excrement>

Arguably this *misophobia* can be attributed to the profound scatontological anxiety which, as Derrida argues, haunts Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and his refusal to accord *Dasein* a gender, a sexuality, or even a body. Consequently, Heidegger is unable to stomach bodily functions, but most especially, the productions of the anus and its abjectified marks. If Heidegger is reluctant to give *Dasein* a materiality then this squeamishness, I argue, has repercussions for a certain queer thinking about the body and its excorporations. In an essay by Michelle Ong on "The Philosophy of Excrement" which appeared in *Vice Magazine* a few years back, she gets real about the ass and theory's abjected coils:

I took a shit in the woods for the first time last weekend while tripping on four hits of acid. As the steaming pile of excrement eased out of my yawning butt cheeks, thoughts of God, mankind, and the universe crackled through the synapses of my electrified neurons. It struck me that while everyone is guilty of contemplating their navels, especially on psychedelics, the field of Shit Studies needs some good probing. Phenomenologically speaking, is there an ontological *différance* between excreta and feces? What are the linguistic ramifications of the protean spellings of the word "diarrhea"? The more I dwelled on the scatological subject—which was now quickly coiling into an Other with the *vraisemblance* of Being—the more I became aware of the need to cast off antediluvian prejudice and fully embrace the powers of ordure³².

The silent Heideggerian (and explicit Derridean) references will not be lost on the reader here. But, as Richard Kearney points out in *Anatheism*, "the fact remains that Heideggerian *Dasein* has no real sense of a living body: Heidegger's decarnalized *Dasein* does not eat, sleep or have sex. It too, remains, despite all the talk of 'being-in-the-world', captive of the transcendental lure"³³. Heidegger's *Dasein* doesn't even take a shit in the woods. What is needed, to counter Heidegger's constipated, anally retentive, non-disseminative ontology, Kearney asserts, is a "fully fledged phenomenology of flesh", the body as "*flesh itself* in all its ontological depth", a return to the body "in its unfathomable *thisness*", a re-corporealizing or re-enfleshing of ontology, a reverse money shot in which the body is fecalized.

Helen's Lacanian body

Charlotte Roche's own reverse money shot in *Wetlands* could be construed as a right pain in the ass for the Symbolic order. As Lee Edelman has recently argued in "White Skin, Dark Meat: Identity's Pressure Point", the Oedipal ruse depends on us not acknowledging this substitutability or reversibility of genital zones that we mentioned above:

for the anal zone, unique among areas eroticized in the various stages that chart libidinal 'development', does not just pass from early pre-eminence to later subordination, it also undergoes a demonization within a heterosexually-inflected Symbolic that subjects the history of its libidinal cathexis to a revisionary repression. It not only loses legitimacy, that is, as a site for the production of desire, it also comes to define the space of what is viscerally *undesirable*, the space that produces our primary cultural referent for disgust³⁴.

The anatomical confusion between front and back, which elsewhere I describe as peri-erotic, carries with it the stain or taint of what Jonathan Dollimore calls "sexual disgust"³⁵. This recoil in the face of sexual disgust and anatomo-genital indeterminacy leads to what Edelman describes as an insistent Oedipalization which would mop up, sanitize and place a *cordon sanitaire* around the mess made by the not-so-clear-cut distinction between the anal and the genital (again I quote Edelman at length):

as a result, the insistent Oedipal—or better, the insistent *Oedipalizing*—focus on castration as the law that secures the truth of a 'clear-cut' genital difference reiterates and displaces the determining, because culturally performative, insistence on another distinction represented as being—which is also to say, represented *so as to be*—clear-cut: that posited between anal and genital to elaborate our governing cultural fantasy of a urethra-genital process able, through the unfailingly redemptive agency of hetero-genital desire, to wash away, as if with a stream of antiseptic astringency, the primal taint of dirt and disgust with which, and as which, the law's prohibition first darkens our youthful doorway—or at any rate, with which it manages to darken the doorway in the back³⁶.

Might we read the filleting of Helen's anus by the doctor as precisely the Symbolic law carving the female body into shape using an Oedipal cleaver?



http://cf.badassdigest.com/_uploads/images/sxsw14_wetlands.jpg

The anxiety caused by dirt, shit, viscera and the subject's enjoyment of that which must not become a site of pleasure but rather one of phobic evisceration leads to a major cleaning up operation for the Symbolic law of hetero-genitality. But that which ought to be phobically repudiated stubbornly returns as an anamorphic blot or shitty stain on the landscape of the "foundational" law. But the Law is everywhere insistent on the effacement of the disgusting and its contaminations. As Dean says "excrement remains an extraordinarily difficult topic for sustained discourse ... even Freud, whose broadmindedness still retains the capacity to astonish, deems perversion most unequivocally pathological when it involves sexual contact with shit"³⁷. Slavoj Žižek elaborates on this anxiety we feel towards our excremental remainder(s) in *The Puppet and The Dwarf* and again in *On Belief*: "The immediate appearance of the inner is formless shit. The small child who gives his shit as a present is in a way giving the immediate equivalent of his inner self. The often-overlooked point is that this piece of myself offered to the Other radically oscillates between the sublime and—not the Ridiculous, but, precisely—the excremental ... We are ashamed of shit because, in it, we expose/externalize our innermost intimacy"³⁸.

However, the paradigmatic or maybe symptomatic Lacanian *object a* is shit. Lacan writes that "It is important to grasp how the organism is taken up in the dialectic of the subject. The organ of what is incorporeal in the sexuated being is that part of the organism the subject places when his separation occurs ... in this way, the object he naturally loses, excrement, and the props he finds in the Other's desire—the Other's gaze or voice—come to this place"³⁹. Here Lacan's model for subjective loss/the castratory cut is not the phallus but faeces, an ungendered object/abject. As Tim Dean muses: "whether or not we're all missing the phallus, certainly we've all lost objects from the anus. And, while we may not be certain that nobody has the phallus, we can be sure everybody has an anus. Castration isn't Lacan's only rubric for loss"⁴⁰. Dean goes on: "To transpose Freudian into Lacanian terms, we can say that by using faeces as both a sexual stimulus and a means of communication the child's relation to shit involves *l'objet petit a* and *le grand Autre*—that is, anality entails both 'big' and 'little' others, the different modes of alterity that constitute the subject and his or her desire"⁴¹. The phallus "is less a figure for the penis than, more fundamentally [fundament is, of course, another word for excrement⁴²], a figure for the turd"⁴³.

Helen's messy, leaking body in *Wetlands* seems to swerve away from the castratory and insistently Oedipalizing prohibitions of the Symbolic toward the Lacanian domain of the Real and her destabilizations and desolidifications of the intact, whole body exposes the leaky ontology of a body which is porous, permeable, and fluid. Tim Dean in *Beyond Sexuality* tries to anatomize our innermost intimacies with (and disquiet about) shit and claims there that "in its most *fundamental* formulations psychoanalysis is a queer theory image for the erogenous zones could be reformulated to suggest that the body exhibits a "number of assholes at its surface" and for Dean, as we have heard, the exemplary Lacanian *objet a* is scat.

In *Unlimited Intimacy* Dean reveals the precise logic of a body which craps out but *without* scatontological anxieties about abjection or besmirchment. In recent hardcore straight and gay porn the fascination with the hypervisibility of male ejaculate (which Calvin Thomas argues is anxiety producing for the male⁴⁴) has been replaced by the hyper-visibility of that part of the body over which we have no ocular control and which evades sexual and gendered differentiation: the anus⁴⁵.



<http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/kuspit/Images/kuspit6-10-18.jpg>

As Dean explains: "one visual fetish of recent straight hard core consists in filming what are known as 'dilations': after a prolonged bout of butt fucking, the woman's rectal sphincter does not immediately contract when the male performers penis is withdrawn, and the camera zooms in for a close up of her gaping anus, in a style very similar to the close-ups of freshly fucked or fisted asses in bareback porn"⁴⁶.

Far from being a disavowal of sexual difference, Dean sees this forensic emphasis on the difference between the inside and the outside of the body (one thinks of the birth canal on the cover of Gallop's *Thinking Through The Body*) by trying to get as far *inside* as possible as "hard core's latest attempt at representing what remains unrepresentable in sexual difference (what Lacanians call the Real of sexual difference)"⁴⁷.



<http://ilovedakotaskye.tumblr.com/>

The recent phenomenon in straight porn of “cum snorting” is interesting insofar as cum is snorted up into the ungendered, undifferentiated nasal cavity (which is always open) from the undifferentiated, ungendered anuses of male or female (sometimes both) porn stars.



http://31.media.tumblr.com/3fa527b086602c3b623415640d4727ba/tumblr_mgoy1zdQKe1rre7kuo4_400.gif

The phenomenon which I called earlier queer theory's hole () complex, and its hypervisualization of the (mostly female porn star's) dilating sphincter has, naturally enough, led to fascination with what the camera/penis cannot normally see: the internal cum shot. The internal pop shot is something which, we might argue, is slightly *less* anxiety-inducing for the male, although the "compromise shot" Dean talks about would suggest it is no less so. Negarestani might call it a "nested cum shot" where the outside creeps in (or out) to the inside⁴⁸. What Roche gives us, more so than the cream pie (the internal cumshot—and I'm imagining cum here as metonymical, figuring *anything* which is emitted from the body's orifices; in the novel it is "ass piss", blood, menses, water) is what Dean formulates as the "reverse money shot".

He explains: "although representations of ass fucking have become virtually *de rigueur* in heterosexual as well as gay hard core and although dilations of the anal sphincter appear across the board, viewers are accustomed to seeing their butt sex headed, as it were, in only one direction"⁴⁹.

Even in pornographic depictions of anal sex, fisting and rimming (any acts which cluster around the anus/rectum/sphincter), then, we witness a certain hygienicization: "as dirty and nasty as it gets in one sense, pornographic images of anal sex are expected to remain meticulously clean in another sense. The market for scat is small indeed. Seeing any bodily product coming out of an anus tends to provoke a visceral reaction of disgust in most adults, irrespective of sexual orientation"⁵⁰.



<https://uproxx.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/wetlands-shitbelly.jpg?w=650&h=292>

All male and female porn stars receive an enema before shooting an anal scene because the spectacle of the body leaking out, of the messy anus, leads to a high "ick factor" which many responses to *Wetlands* attest to and as Dean admits: "the spectacle of the reverse money shot takes some getting used to: various sensations have to be overcome before one can find such an image unequivocally erotic [this was certainly my own experience of watching cum snorting for the first time]. Fluids that trace the pathway of shit as they leave the body almost inevitably recall our earliest taboos about what's sexually enjoyable"⁵¹. While many of the scenes from bareback pornography of reverse money shots, cum pushed out of the anus are allo-erotic (and designed to be witnessed—both by other participants in the scene and by the putative audience for the film), one interview "Max Holden and his Dildos", which Dean discusses, dramatizes an *auto*-erotic spectacle with striking similarities to Helen Memel's autoerotic pleasures with her "brown water" in *Wetlands*.



http://www.treasureislandmedia.com/cart/images/videoimages/fuckcrazy_27.jpg

Holden holds semen inside him from the night before and relates that "If I go out and get fucked I have cum, loads, inside me, I save it inside me, and then the next day I squat it out into a bowl, and then I'm playing with my toys and I eat it"⁵². Just like Helen consuming the flesh removed from her anus after her operation Holden with his toys joys (an anal *jouissance*) in the fluid productions—cum and shit— of his rectum and "challenges another level of disgust"⁵³.

Derridean disgust

Roche's novel might be considered as a challenge in itself to a long German (recall that the novel is written in German) tradition of "sexual disgust" and prudishness. Heidegger, as we saw already, can countenance no production of abjectified marks or inscriptions. And if Helen Memel is all about the aesthetics of the cunt and its flows it is Immanuel Kant who is keen to wash away the disgusting in his transcendental aesthetics. For Kant, in the third critique, *ekel* (disgust, loathing) is that which is inassimilable to the field of aesthetics and the beautiful. The disgusting is what makes Kant gag and it functions as the limit case for him, as that which is unintegratable. Or, in the context of Helen's anuses-as-mouths (or vice versa: mouths-as-anuses), the disgusting is what Kant cannot digest, cannot hold down. In "Economimesis" Derrida anatomizes this antipathy toward disgust in the Kantian system and writes that *ekel* functions as the "border which traces its limit and

the frame of its *parergon*, in other words, that which is excluded from it and what, proceeding from this exclusion, gives it form, limit and contour"⁵⁴. Disgust's productive repudiation from the field of good taste, as with the law of the Symbolic in psychoanalytic discourse, defines and gives shape and coherence to the field of the aesthetic itself. As Derrida shows it is vomit which is particularly unrepresentable and indigestible for Kant and therefore must "cause itself to be vomited"⁵⁵.

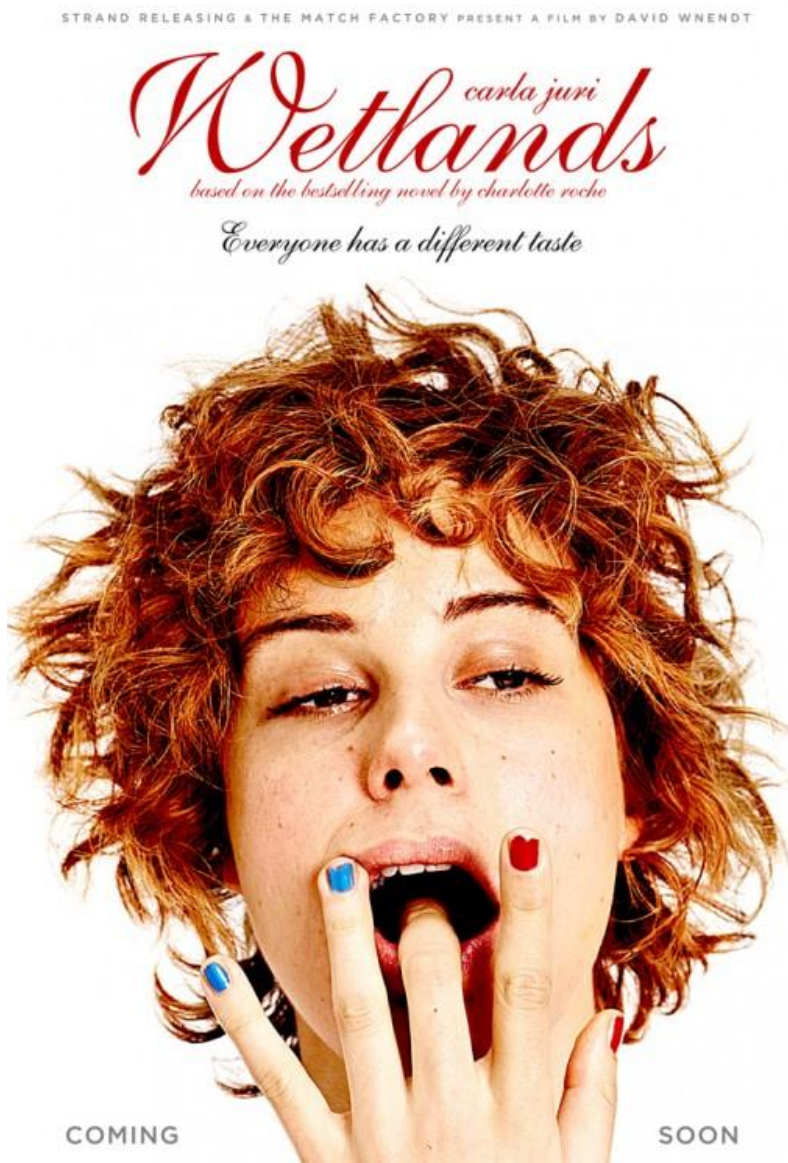


http://f.internetara.com/onbellek/12/12/25/iuuq_NV_00gpsvn_SL_ofu_SL_is0dgt_NK_gjmftztufn_gjmf_SL_btiy0_SK__SK_lfz0DpnnvojuzTfswfs_SL_Ejtdvttjpot_SL_Dpnqpofout_SL_Gjmft08808255_SL_3hjsmt2dvq_SK_3E11_SK_hsptt_SL_kqh.jpg

This Derridean reverse money shot (how can one forget the most nauseating moment in *Wetlands* when Helen and her friend taste each other's vomit for the first time) allows vomit to stand in metonymically, to figure for *all* that is excluded, rejected, emitted, expelled from the clean and properly fortified body. Disgust is that which becomes too proximate and therefore must be, indeed as Derrida says, "can *only* be vomited"⁵⁶. This is disgust's perversion, because as Derrida cautions, it "makes one *desire* to vomit"⁵⁷.

Vomit, for Derrida, becomes something desired, perversely so given the ban on enjoyment of the disgusting, and even if we might not think of puke as unequivocally erotic. We cannot fail to recall Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's encounter with erotic vomiting in their essay "Sex in Public"⁵⁸.

They stumble upon a scene of erotic vomiting in a club which showcased a Wednesday night sex performance called "Pork".



http://www.screenrelish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/feuchtgebiete_ver4.jpg

On this particular evening "word was circulating that the performance was to be erotic vomiting. This sounded like an appetite spoiler, and the thought of leaving early occurred to us but was overcome by a simple curiosity: what would the foreplay be like? Let's stay until it gets messy. Then we can leave"⁵⁹. At first Berlant and Warner feel a certain Kantian aversiveness. Even in a club where "spanking, flagellation, shaving, branding, laceration, bondage, humiliation, wrestling"⁶⁰ are *de rigeur*, erotic vomiting pushes at the limits of good taste. But as Derrida argues in "Economimesis" it is this very aversion, this too-proximateness of the disgusting, which fuels our desire and our

curiosity and causes us to flout the ban on erotic enjoyment of the disgusting so much so that we stay with the mess: "we realize we cannot leave, cannot even look away. No one can. The crowd is transfixed by the scene of intimacy and display, control and abandon, ferocity and abjection. People are moaning softly with admiration, then whistling, stomping, screaming encouragement"⁶¹.

Again, as we saw with Lacan there is a tendency to stick with disgust which localizes in and around the mouth although the *objet a* can figure the gaze (the eye is also we might note a sphincter) as well as the voice. Derrida in his critique of Kant also stays with the mouth. But for Kant there is something even worse than vomit, even worse than the very worst: smell. And even in *Wetlands* it is smell which is viscerally undesirable. Helen, who seems to be uptight about nothing at all, is totally grossed out by, gags on the smell of that which she otherwise joys in. And smell leaves such a bad taste in her mouth that she mentions it no less than four times.

In a reading of David Lynch's film *Wild at Heart* Eugenie Brinkema notes that Laura Dern's vomit (which is not visualized) lingers in the film and permeates it (vomit-becoming-form) but as smell it is parergonally overflowing since it is not fully locatable within the film's audio-visual economy⁶². In Roche's novel para-sensual smell is equally unlocatable and allows for a (textual) displacement from the visual on to the olfactory and this further extends, or opens up, a place *beyond* Edelman and Dollimore's disgusting, which is that "something more disgusting than the disgusting, than what disgusts taste. The chemistry of smell exceeds the tautology taste/disgust"⁶³. Brinkema argues that if we stay with disgust's sensual workings for long enough we are invited to "a worse that is always yet to come"⁶⁴. This Derridean formulation of the disgust *à-venir* (to-come) holds out an unsuspected ethical promise which in Derrida often goes under the name of the messianic.



<http://i.ytimg.com/vi/arMRzjpkQA/maxresdefault.jpg>

And, if I may be permitted an unforgivable pun, Helen's messy anus in *Wetlands* also opens up an ethico-political messianicity. Her moist, orificial body, which refuses to be dammed or stoppered up, keeps the movement and possibility of disgust open. Roche's final reverse money shot might then be that her "disgust to-come" heralds a "new aesthetics" which Stanley Cavell calls for when he asks that we "learn to maintain our disgust more easily than we learn to maintain what disgusts us".

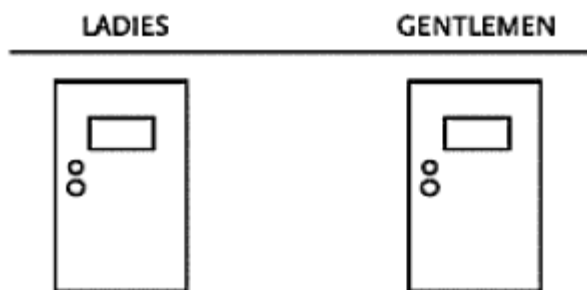
Just as Brinkema argues for vomit-as-form she also claims that rot is not something self evidently disgusting either (the suppurating corpse comes to mind). She does this in an essay which reads for rot in Peter Greenaway's film *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (via the virtually unknown Hungarian phenomenologist Aurel Kolnai who wrote a 1929 treatise *Der Ekel* which sounds like it could have been written yesterday)⁶⁵. Brinkema writes that "rot is neither immediate nor visceral nor obvious, and decay is certainly not a metaphor for moral declivity or ideological distaste: instead, putrescence is a *structure-in-process*, a textually constituting gesture that must be *read for*"⁶⁶. In effect, what Brinkema is saying is that texts—cinematic, literary, architectural, and so on—can always be read as structurally in the process of decaying. Rot is not a fixed, concrete or knowable thing. Rot, like disgust, is always forming and giving form (in Derridean terms is always

the worse to-come). We could rewrite Berlant and Warner's "exuding some rut" as exuding some *rot*. In Steve Finbow's cultural history of necrophilia *Grave Desire* he concludes that necrophilia is placed at the very outermost limits of sexual taste because ingrained cultural laws to do with moral, sexual and physical disgust must be "overcome" in order to fuck a corpse leaking urine, faeces, blood, vomit and in various stages of rotting and putrefaction⁶⁷.

As Derrida says it is because vomit forces pleasure that it is disgusting. But this very revulsion is what causes it (the disgusting) to be desired. Perversely, the disgusting—shit, vomit, menses, urine, and other excorporated mess— leads to excessive *jouissance*. Even though figures such as Nietzsche revalue disgust as a category he does not, for the most part, escape the *negative* valuation of the disgusting as that which Kantian aesthetics cannot speak. What Derrida does is to positively, affirmatively revalue that which aesthetics cannot digest, that we might take pleasure in the disgusting.

Enjoy your Tampon!

To conclude: the reverse money shot has operated in this essay as a figure for critico-theoretical moments where that which we expect to be tethered together refuses to cohere neatly or is unsutured. There is a famous moment in Lacan where a train is stopped on the platform and the two children see the two bathrooms marked ladies and gentlemen.



http://thediagram.com/12_1/shipley.png

Imagine if in those two stalls we have Helen Memel and her friend Irene, both on their periods, passing their used tampons under the door and inserting the other's tampon into their vagina.



<http://www.cinemablend.com/images/facebook/news/67179/67179.jpg>

In this scene I would like to locate a moment of reflection as we contemplate feminism and queer theory's fluid, wet futures. I want to argue, as I have been throughout, that queer and feminist thinking must—following Roche—exceed and overspill its own cleanness, antiseptism and propriety.



<http://i.ytimg.com/vi/1LCYRFkUw74/maxresdefault.jpg>

Like Helen who inspects her friend's tampon *closely* before inserting it, queer and feminist theory needs to get over its profound and deep-seated squeamishness and hygienicizations, needs to get past its sanonormativities and tarry, without delay, with the "disgust to-come".

[Note from *InterAlia*'s editorial team: due to the journal's policy ([see here](#)) four images have been edited out of the article. However, they can be accessed [here](#).]

Notes

- ¹ This is a shortened and much revised version of a presentation entitled "Bleurgh! On the Erotics of Disgust" given at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London on 19 November 2014. Thanks to Fabio Gygi and Caroline Osella for inviting me.
- ² Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (London@ Routledge: 2008), 69.
- ³ Stanley Cavell, "On Makavejev On Bergman" [1979] in William Rothman (ed) *Cavell on Film* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005). He goes on to say that "this will require a transformation of the five senses, a new perspective, a new aesthetics". Tina Kendall provides a valuable and comprehensive survey of writing about the disgusting from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. See "Introduction: Tarrying with Disgust", *Film-Philosophy* (2011), <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/view/923/801>.
- ⁴ Margrit Shildrick's *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* and her work in general have been hugely influential for me since I first encountered it fifteen years ago. See *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- ⁵ This extract is part of a larger project on erotics, aesthetics and bodily fluids. It could be called in Aristotelian fashion *Peri Erotics* ("About Erotics" or "On Erotics").
- ⁶ See Jennifer Boyd's essay "I Feel Queezy: Feelings, Guts, Revolutions" which appears in the reader accompanying the exhibition *Feeling Queezy?!* curated and edited by Rebeka Põldsam in Tallinn, Estonia (August/September 2014). The other texts collected in the reader are Sedgwick on reparative and paranoid reading and Renate Lorenz on Freak Theory and contemporary art.
- ⁷ Charlotte Roche, *Wetlands*, trans. Tim Mohr (London: Fourth Estate, 2009). The title is perhaps best rendered in English as "moist regions". The film is directed by David Wnendt (2013): <http://wetlandsmovie.com/>
- ⁸ Justin E.H. Smith, "Sea Slugs", *N + 1* (March 2008), <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/book-review/sea-slugs/>
- ⁹ Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

- ¹⁰ Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 3-30.
- ¹¹ Jane Gallop, "Bersani's Freudian Body", *PMLA* 125.2 (March 2010): 393-397. "And so the first time I read this book, I was disappointed, frustrated, and even a little angry. I did not find 'the Freudian body' promised by the title. 'Bait and switch', I thought bitterly. 'You fucking tease!'" (393).
- ¹² See my "Peri-Aesthetics", *Peripheries* (2014): <http://www.peripheriesonline.org/peri-aesthetics/>. On flirting see Anna Kłosowska, "Flirting as a Critical Mode: Barthes, Alcibiades, Sartre", *postmedieval* 2.3 (2011): 278-290. Wayne Koestenbaum has described ellipses as "fingering the abyss" in his talk "Punctuation", Royal College of Art, London, May 23, 2014.
- ¹³ To reopen her anal wound Helen deliberately squats down on the brakes of her hospital bed.
- ¹⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).
- ¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Anality: News from the Front" in Jonathan Goldberg (ed), *The Weather in Proust* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 172.
- ¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- ¹⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 25-26.
- ¹⁸ Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 7.
- ¹⁹ See "Peri-Aesthetics". Agamben's essays on pornography are all interested in the disinterested face of the porn star but it is in *Means Without End* where we find this imperative.
- ²⁰ Paul De Man, "Shelley Disfigured" in Harold Bloom et al (eds), *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979).
- ²¹ Everywhere in Žižek but see especially *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997).
- ²² Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 25-26.
- ²³ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 315.
- ²⁴ Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- ²⁵ Cited in Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 82.
- ²⁶ Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- ²⁷ Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Melbourne: Re: Press, 2008), 44. See also Zach Blas, "Queerness, Openness" in Cyclonopedia Symposium, *Leper Creativity* (New York: punctum books, 2012), 101-114 and my "Negarestani's Queer Polytics of the Twist" (forthcoming).
- ²⁸ Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, 53.

- ²⁹ *Cyclonopedia*, 49.
- ³⁰ The term "scatontological" is borrowed from Calvin Thomas' *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). This remarkable book focuses on abjectified bodily fluids in Derrida, Heidegger, Freud, Bataille, Joyce, and Hegel.
- ³¹ The term scat-isfaction is also taken from Calvin Thomas. As well as his *Male Matters* see *Masculinity, Psychoanalysis, Straight Queer Theory: Essays on Abjection in Literature, Mass Culture and Film* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).
- ³² Michelle Ong, "Philosophy as Excrement", *Vice Magazine* (April 20, 2011), <http://www.vice.com/read/the-philosophy-of-excrement>.
- ³³ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 88.
- ³⁴ Lee Edelman, "White Skin, Dark Meat: Identity's Pressure Point", *identities: journal for politics, gender and culture* 8.1 (2011): 99-113.
- ³⁵ Jonathan Dollimore, "Sexual Disgust", *Oxford Literary Review* 20.1 (1998): 47-78.
- ³⁶ Edelman, "White Skin, Dark Meat", 101.
- ³⁷ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 83.
- ³⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 58-59.
- ³⁹ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 81.
- ⁴⁰ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 81.
- ⁴¹ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 82.
- ⁴² See Jeffrey Masten, "Is the Fundament a Grave?" in David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (eds), *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 129-145.
- ⁴³ Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*, 82.
- ⁴⁴ See Calvin Thomas on sperm and piss as *objet a* in *Male Matters* (47-73).
- ⁴⁵ On ocularity, the scopic and anality see D.A. Miller's classic essay, "Anal Rope" in Diana Fuss (ed) *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London: Routledge, 1991), 119-141; Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), Edelman, "Rear Window's Glasshole" in Ellis Hanson (ed), *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1999), 72-96; Ellis Hanson, "Cinema *a tergo*: Shooting in Elephant" in Mikko Tuhkanen (ed), *Leo Bersani: Queer Theory and Beyond* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014), 83-104.
- ⁴⁶ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 110-111.

- ⁴⁷ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 111.
- ⁴⁸ Dean describes the "compromise shot" as one in which the male performer pulls out and begins cumming outside "so that the camera can record his climax". He then reinserts his cock to finish cumming inside. *Unlimited Intimacy*, 131.
- ⁴⁹ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 136.
- ⁵⁰ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 136.
- ⁵¹ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 136.
- ⁵² Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 137.
- ⁵³ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 137.
- ⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis", *diacritics* 11 (1975): 3-25 (21).
- ⁵⁵ Derrida, "Economimesis", 21.
- ⁵⁶ Derrida, "Economimesis", 23.
- ⁵⁷ Derrida, "Economimesis", 23.
- ⁵⁸ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public", *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (Winter 1998): 547-566.
- ⁵⁹ Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public", 564.
- ⁶⁰ Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public", 564.
- ⁶¹ Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public", 565.
- ⁶² Eugenie Brinkema, "Laura Dern's Vomit, or, Kant and Derrida in Oz", *Film-Philosophy* 15.2 (2011), <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/view/276>
- ⁶³ Derrida, "Economimesis", 25.
- ⁶⁴ Brinkema, "Laura Dern's Vomit", 62.
- ⁶⁵ Eugenie Brinkema, "Rot's Progress: Gastronomy According to Peter Greenaway", *differences* 21 (2010): 73-96.
- ⁶⁶ See also Rosemary Deller, "The Body that 'Melted into the Carpet': Mortal Stains and Domestic Dissolution in Carol Morley's *Dreams of a Life*" (forthcoming).
- ⁶⁷ Steve Finbow, *Grave Desire: A Cultural History of Necrophilia* (Winchester; Zer0 Books, 2014), 154-155.

Exchanging Bodily Fluids: Transubstantiations in Contemporary Pornography

Helen Hester

Introduction: The Critical Response to Gagging in Pornography

Gagging is arguably one of the most high-profile elements of the contemporary pornographic landscape, with the involuntary muscular spasms resulting from irrumatio (or rough deep throat fellatio) being showcased in even relatively mainstream gonzo porn releases. Titles such as *Asa Akira is Insatiable 3* (2012) and *Flesh Hunter 11* (2012), for example, feature irrumatio as part of a wider repertoire of gonzo sex acts, suggesting that whilst the stimulation of the gag reflex may not always in itself constitute a discrete pornographic "number" (Williams 72),¹ it is at least a signature step in gonzo's established choreography. Gagging's profile is further enhanced by the fact that, in addition to operating as a key generic component, irrumatio has generated a popular pornographic subgenre of its own. The adult video-on-demand website *Hot Movies*, for example, lists "Gagging" as a distinct category of "Oral," with a total of 311 dedicated entries.² A number of extensive series are devoted to the practice, including *Chokers and Gaggers*, *Face Fucking Inc.*, and *Throat Gaggers*, the latter of which promises "sluts [...] covered in slime" and "Blowjobs as a full contact sport!"

Perhaps understandably given the at times deliberately inflammatory and provocative framing of these practices within the industry, much of the commentary upon gagging as a pornographic practice focuses upon its apparent misogyny. Critics concentrate upon the potentially troubling manner in which irrumatio stages gendered power relations (or more accurately, gendered power imbalances) within an overtly sexualized context. Robert Jensen, for example, presents "exclusively aggressive 'throat fucking'" as illustrative of pornography's pervasive hostility towards women (44), whilst Pamela Paul suggests that "multiple oral sex scenes in which the girl is shown to choke on genitalia and semen" are part of a worrying trend towards the acceptance of increasingly extreme and misogynistic content in hard core (8).

The academic and activist Gail Dines, meanwhile, uses *irrumatio* as an example of one of contemporary adult entertainment's most damning excesses. She positions it at the heart of gonzo's generic formula – "There are X number of minutes given over to oral sex, often leading to the woman gagging, then anal, then double penetration, and then ejaculation" (Dines 68) – whilst linking this formula to the numbing of male empathy and the eroticizing of female subjugation. She also gives over several early pages to a discussion of *Gag Factor* (a specialist line of gagging porn), during the course of which she offers detailed and disturbing descriptions of the product. These descriptions are, it would seem, intended to enlighten her readers regarding the extremity of today's pornographic content whilst also rendering them particularly receptive to an anti-pornography message:

On the site are hundreds of pictures of young women with penises thrust deep into their throat. Some are gagging, others crying, and virtually all have faces, especially their eyes, covered in semen. The user is bombarded with images of mascara running, hair being pulled, throats in a vicelike grip, nostrils being pinched so the women can't breathe as the penis fills the mouth, and mouths that are distended by either hands pulling the lips apart or penises inserted sideways. (Dines xix-xx)

This site is then positioned as part of a wider pornographic culture – a culture in which "the man makes hate to the woman" and "each sex act is designed to deliver the maximum amount of degradation" (Dines xxiv-xxv).

In the work of commentators such as Dines, Jensen, and Paul, then, *irrumatio* has a clear and monosemic message, and the scenarios of gendered violence and male power that it apparently enacts are positioned as evidence of the aggressive tendencies of pornography in general. However, I would argue that there is more to gagging than "an intensification of the blowjob, a deep penetration of the mouth, an obvious staging of male power" (Stüttgen, "Disidentification in the Center of Power" 52); in fact, the manner in which this act is represented raises a number of interesting questions about the operation and limitations of the generic visual language of photorealistic hard core. In particular, the incorporation of corporeal paroxysms and the utilization of abject bodily fluids within representations of *irrumatio* would seem to prompt a re-examination of certain critical assumptions about the aesthetics of pornography. In what ways might the

seemingly one-dimensional imagery of gagging serve to open up a discussion about the generic conventions of porn? How are abject substances coded, represented, and invested with significance, and how might they be said to contribute to pornography's attempt to visualize female desire? Drawing upon Linda Williams's scholarly work on pornography, along with examples from contemporary adult entertainment, this essay will attempt to provide at least a partial answer to these key questions.

An Alternative Aesthetics of Pornographic Fluids

Semen is widely accepted as the pornographic fluid *par excellence*. Not only does it have little cultural visibility beyond the confines of adult entertainment,³ but it plays a key role in the structuring of many contemporary porn scenes. Numerous Porn Studies scholars have identified the centrality of male ejaculate within the current conventions of the genre; Linda Williams, for example, discusses porn's "reliance on visible penile ejaculations (money shots) as proof of pleasure," describing it as "one of the most significant features of the form" (8), and remarks upon the manner in which the money shot has 'assumed the narrative function of signalling the climax of a genital event' (93). In a similar vein, Pasi Falk discusses the "anti-representational logic of hard-core pornography" (17), in which "scenes of explicit ejaculation" are exploited for their apparent indexical evidentiality (19), whilst Lisa Jean Moore and Juliana Weissbein suggest that the pornographic "male gaze is constantly reinforced through the ejaculating of a masculine glaze, a glaze that coats the other and the self with a glossy, slippery substance that modifies social relations" (78). However, whilst gagging pornography has by no means eschewed a reliance on the external cum shot – the signalling of male climax typically retains a privileged significance in terms of narrative sequencing – I would argue that the subgenre has developed its own aesthetics of fluids. In fact, it utilizes a visual language which (contingently, problematically, and temporarily) displaces the male cum shot, whilst also mirroring and extending it, as an alternative set of abject bodily fluids are pushed to the fore.

We might draw an example from the on-going series *Throat Gaggers*, a specialist line currently on its 14th instalment. The opening scene of *Throat Gaggers 13* (2007) features porn star Allison Pierce alongside the male performer Johnny Fender and, from behind the camera, the director Juan Cuba. The scene begins with Pierce pulling up to a car park and talking briefly with the director, before heading inside to the men's bathroom. Here, she discovers Fender waiting for her in one of the

stalls, and the action quickly proceeds to the subgenre's standard fare of multiple rough blowjobs and acts of irrumatio. During the course of the scene, we witness Fender dipping his penis in and out of his co-star's mouth, often wholly withdrawing it in order to elicit strands of saliva and mucous. He repeatedly rubs his cock around the exterior of Pierce's mouth and slaps it across her cheeks and chin, resulting in the visible smearing of her face with fluids. She gags noisily and sporadically throughout the performance and, at around the 10 minute mark, we hear her coughing and spluttering as the male performer performs irrumatio whilst holding her in place by her hair. The scene concludes with a facial cum shot.

This scene includes many of the standard generic markers of contemporary gagging porn; the emphasis is largely shifted from genital intercourse and close-up "meat shots" (Williams 72) of the penis entering the vagina or anus in favour of shots of the face and, particularly, of the deep penetration of the mouth. The inclusion of the images and sounds of choking and retching emphasizes the activation of the gag reflex, whilst the inclusion of dialogue from the male participants deliberately intensifies the viewer's sense of the eroticisation of force: the phrase "Choke on that cock," for example, is repeated like an erotic litany. One of the key market differentiators of gagging porn, however, is its focus upon an alternative set of bodily emissions: whilst the scene concludes with the generically mandated money shot, the fluids which are consistently privileged throughout are those produced by the female performer. In the course of the rough and repeated acts of irrumatio, she produces saliva, mucous from the nose and throat, and tears. The camera does not attempt to ignore these corporeal by-products, but lingers upon them, and adjusts its position in order to better represent them. The director dwells upon Pierce's face throughout, but comes in particularly close when the first tear of exertion rolls down her cheek. In the case of *Throat Gaggers 13*, the female's fluids are the real star; her made-up face becomes moist with its own secretions, as her male co-star accompanies her performance with repeated verbal cues: "I love that fucking spit," "Look at that spit, look at that spit, look at that spit."

This interest in representing an alternative set of bodily substances – a number of which meet Julia Kristeva's definition of the abject as "something to be ejected, or separated" (127)⁴ – is not unique to *Throat Gaggers 13*. In fact, such an interest is fairly pervasive within gagging pornography, as evidenced by the manner in which many of its products are marketed. Many of the films and series within this subgenre share a similar visual logic in terms of their design and branding, for example,

and this includes a focus upon capturing the various secretions of the female performers' faces. The stills used for DVD box covers, promotional web content, or other paratextual materials typically include details like spit bubbles, nasal secretions, or globules of mucous. The box cover for the 2010 movie *Gag Factor 31* (displayed with others on the *Gag Factor* website) shows a heavily made up blonde woman with blood-shot eyes, situated over the body of her male co-star in something like the 69 position. She is looking into the camera, with her lips around the head of his erect penis, and a thick string of viscid mucous descends from her nose, running the length of the shaft of the penis and down onto the testicles. There is also a bead of cloudy white mucous (or is it ejaculate?) hanging from a strand of her hair.

We find evidence of a similar aesthetic not only throughout the other box covers in the *Gag Factor* series, but also in the marketing materials of other specialist lines. *Choke on my Cock*, *Throated*, and *Black Gag*, to name just three, all feature photographs of the faces of their female performers smeared with a profusion of semi-opaque bodily secretions. The visuals used in marketing these lines are reinforced by the advertising copy. That is to say, the linguistic rhetoric which tends to surround adult entertainment's representation of irrumatio includes a similar focus upon an alternative set of pornographic bodily substances. The copy used to promote Jonni Darkko's *Sloppy Head 4* on the *Hot Movies* website, for example, promises scenes that are "just dripping with intense deep-throat gagging, phlegm, spit bubbles... and enough saliva to drown several cocks." The site's blurb for *Choke On My Cock*, meanwhile, states that "There's so much spit, more than enough to cover the cocks and balls and even compete with the ocean of cum that slides down their face and tongues." The fluids of the face, then, play a key role in selling depictions of irrumatio to the consumer. These emissions, it would appear, are at the heart of gagging porn's generic appeal, to the extent that they "even compete" with the more conventional representation of seminal fluids.

Displacements and Transubstantiations: Linda Williams's "Frenzy of the Visible"

How, then, are we to understand the prominence of this alternative set of bodily emissions within gagging pornography? Can it be related to the external ejaculation and to the generic convention of the money shot? In some ways, I would agree with Tim Stüttgen's comment that "Through more bodily fluids like spit and tears, an attempt is made to somehow double the effect of the cum shot" (Stüttgen "Before Orgasm," 12): the focus upon tears, saliva, and other forms of facial slime works

to replicate and amplify the representation of male ejaculate reflected in the visual comparisons it invites. The emissions drawn out by vigorous deep throat fellatio redouble the conventional money shot to some extent; they target the face, smearing it with the viscous and abject by-products of sexual contact. The pleasures of the money shot – supposedly the pleasures of "marking territory and claiming ownership" (Moore and Weissbein 78) – are therefore extended. The money shot is no longer contained within the final act of a pornographic performance, but is instead laced through the scene as a whole, gradually intensifying as the oral penetrations, and concomitant choking and gagging, build throughout the course of the pornographic performance.

However, there is more to explore here, for whilst the visual depiction of facial emissions can in some ways be seen to prolong the effect and visual impact of the external ejaculation, it also to some extent substitutes for or displaces it. As the money shot is extended, and its generic and aesthetic function performed by an alternative variety of fluids, semen loses its uniquely privileged role in signalling the woman as "a site to be marked (leaving the ejaculator unmarked)" (Moore and Weissbein 79). The position of semen, in other words, is usurped by bodily secretions produced by the woman herself. This may prompt us to question why gagging pornography requires a supplement to the facial cum shot at all. In what ways does the representation of external penile ejaculation fail to meet the demands of the subgenre? How does gagging porn's use of facial slime work to augment the pleasures of pornography more generally? We can find at least a partial answer to these questions within Linda Williams's ground breaking study *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*.

In this text, Williams traces the evolution of the cum shot back to the earliest days of photography, detecting its origins within a "cinematic will-to-knowledge" that has been operational "ever since photographer Edward Muybridge first threw the image of naked moving bodies on the screen of his lecture hall and ever since Thomas Edison ordered his technicians to photograph a sneeze" (101). Photography as a form, she argues, has long been driven to seek "visual evidence of the mechanical "truth" of bodily pleasure caught in an involuntary spasm" (101), and, in the case of hard-core pornography, this is extended to "the ultimate and uncontrollable – ultimate *because* uncontrollable – confession of sexual pleasure in the climax of the orgasm" (101, original emphasis). The appeal of the money shot, then, can be at least partially attributed to the pleasures

of witnessing the "frenzy of the visible" (Williams 7) – seeing the authentic convulsions of the human body in a state of intensity graphically depicted in photorealistic detail.

This is complicated somewhat when the issue of gender is brought to bear, for whilst the representation of external ejaculation no doubt facilitates a visual encounter with the male sexual climax, the "truth" of female pleasure remains un-visualized. This is particularly troubling for heterosexual pornography, where the genre is largely positioned as being *about* encountering the female body and its pleasures. With the money shot, as Williams puts it, adult entertainment's "visibility extends only to a knowledge of the hydraulics of male ejaculation, which, though certainly of interest, is a poor substitute for the knowledge of female wonders that the genre as a whole still seeks" (Williams 94). But if heterosexual photorealistic pornography is primarily invested in exploring (and exposing) the secrets of the female body, then why has the depiction of semen in particular become so crucial to the genre's visual vocabulary of pleasure?⁵

For Williams, this question concerns the limitations of pornography as a moving image genre and, indeed, the limitations of cinema as a medium. Despite its seeming explicitness, adult entertainment draws our attention to the unavoidable constraints associated with the practice of *making visible*. As Karen Boyle puts it, "Pornography is produced according to a principle of maximum visibility, not maximum sensation: the goal is to make sure the viewer gets a good look" (206). In necessarily privileging the ocular, filmic hard core struggles to generate a successful and convincing visual vocabulary of female desire. Whilst, as Falk remarks, the "phallic system" can demonstrate the "actual presence of (sufficient) sexual arousal" (18), and can therefore function as "an 'indexical sign' in [the] Peircean sense" (19), a female porn performer's pleasure is less easy to verify within the conventions and constraints of the medium. It cannot present or deliver itself unequivocally to the lens. After all, "the female partner is able to lie or act" (Falk 18), thus rendering the task of generating "a convincing representation of *female sexual pleasure* in the absence of evidential signs" particularly problematic (Falk 19).

This inability to capture female desire, pleasure, and climax using porn's conventional representational strategies results, somewhat counter-intuitively, in the genre's celebration of and (over-)reliance upon the spectacle of seminal ejaculation. That is to say, the genre compensates for its failure to demonstrate and prove certain kinds of orgasmic pleasures with an overemphasis

upon others. It enacts the fetishistic exchange of the male climax for the female; it is, to quote Williams, a "form of cinematic perversion" and a "fetish substitute for less visible [...] instances of genital connection" (95). In short, then, adult entertainment represents "the obsessive attempt of a phallic visual economy to represent and "fix" the exact moment of the sexual act's involuntary convulsion of pleasure" (Williams 113), and it displaces its interest in the supposedly invisible female orgasm onto the fetishized representation of external ejaculation.

In the case of pornographic depictions of irrumatio, then, we are faced with a further complication of what is already a fairly complex contortion of pornography's underlying investments. As we have seen, gagging pornography uses the secretions of the throat, mouth, eyes, and nose to both extend and prefigure the conventional cum shot, smearing the faces of female performers with their own emissions. The pornographic principle of maximum visibility is therefore temporarily redirected, as an obsession with the emissions of the male body at the moment of orgasm is supplanted by an obsession with abject facial slime. What we have here is a double displacement, from the obscure moistenings of the female orgasm onto the more visually legible fluids of penile ejaculation, and then from this male cum shot onto the sexually-derived secretions of the face. In other words, we go from female genital fluids to female facial fluids, via male ejaculatory fluids.

This is strongly suggested by certain moments in Allison Pierce's scene in *Throat Gaggers 13*. At one point, her co-star instructs her to "rub that spit in your pussy;" Pierce scoops up the viscid slime from his cock with her fingers and does as requested, repeatedly touching her vagina and withdrawing her hand to show that cloudy white strands of mucous have been (or are being) transferred from her hand to her labia. The secretions of the woman's face and mouth are first transferred to the penis, where they function as something like a non-climatic money shot, before they are conveyed to the vagina. Here, bodily fluids are literally transferred, as wetness is returned to the female genital organs in a more visually accessible form. Interestingly, this effect of displacement is also enhanced via the scene's comparable use of sound. There is a cut nearing the conclusion of the scene, during which the camera jumps from a pseudo-POV shot of Pierce on her knees, taken from just behind the male performer's body, to a close-up of her masturbating with her hand inside her purple knickers. This image is accompanied by a soundtrack of churning wetness, which seemingly coincides with the rhythmical movements of her hands. For the duration of the shot (a mere two seconds or so), it appears as if the sounds are emanating from her vagina –

a soundtrack of moist arousal and authentic female pleasure – before the camera pans up to show their true origin; Fender, gripping her hair and performing irrumatio. The sounds of the sloppy deep throat blow job momentarily overlay the image of Pierce touching herself, allowing for a temporary sonic displacement of oral moisture onto the vagina, and briefly facilitating a fantasy of accessing and documenting the pleasures of the female body.

It is also worth noting, I think, that this displacement of bodily secretions is mirrored by shifts in the representation of involuntary corporeal convulsions. The choking cough and the dry-heave play a significant role within irrumatio-centric adult entertainment. Many of its sexual technologies appear to be angling for these kinds of involuntary response, from the depth, speed, and duration of the male performer's thrusts to the trend for "nostrils being pinched so the women can't breathe" (Dines xx). For example, in the opening scene of 2004's *Gag Factor 15* (and, indeed, throughout the various instalments of this long running series), we see the camera repeatedly zoom in on porn performer Ashley Blue as she retches and coughs, retaining a tightly cropped close-up of her face whenever she appears to experience an involuntary bodily paroxysm of any kind.

This is, at least in the examples I have mentioned here, a common trait of gagging pornography, and reiterates the logic of the two-fold exchange of bodily fluids in operation within the subgenre. In other words, I would contend that this type of adult entertainment can again be seen to plot a circuitous path back to the female body via the pornographic frenzy of the visible. The ecstatic shudders of the female body beside itself become the convulsions of a visually verifiable penile ejaculation, and these are in turn displaced by the similarly involuntary and telegenic muscular spasms of the agitated gag reflex. In this sense, the aesthetics of contemporary gagging pornography enacts not only an exchange of bodily fluids, but an exchange of corporeal paroxysms.

Provoking Reactions and Moving the Body

This correlation of a pornographic interest in female sexual response with an interest in the sexually explicit depiction of women choking, gagging, and crying requires further unpacking. Could the representation of two things as diverse as an orgasm and a dry heave really be said to tap into a common set of scopophilic or epistemophilic spectatorial investments? It would be worth reflecting upon the idea of displacement in greater detail here, I think, for whilst the connection of two

seemingly such disparate kinds of bodily response may strike one as counter-intuitive, a number of theorists of pornography have suggested that a set of exchanges, replacements, and substitutions may be at work within the content and reception of the genre. Williams, for example, detects a certain slippage of adult entertainment's generic interests within one of its highest profile (and most controversial) categories – sadomasochistic pornography.

Discussing some of the various forms, types of content, and representational strategies deployed within the S/M subgenre, Williams refers to the "displacement of a hard-to-see pleasure onto an easier-to-see, and apparently similarly involuntary, response to pain" (203). As with gagging porn's transference of the orgasmic shudder onto the paroxysmic retch or dry heave, certain kinds of S/M imagery can be seen to enact a comparable displacement. That is to say, they relocate porn's "obsessive attempt [...] to represent and "fix" the exact moment of the sexual act's involuntary convulsion" (Williams 113) from one instinctive corporeal response to another. This extension of the frenzy of the visible may prompt us to reflect upon how we currently characterize pornography's content and generic pleasures. Conventionally, as Lawrence O'Toole insists, people assume that contemporary "porn is a sex thing" (342), but the very possibility of this kind of displacement would seem to suggest the potential for a more diverse set of investments. In other words, the affective kick that comes with witnessing the involuntary reactions and convulsions of the human body is not connected exclusively to the activities of genital sexuality, but may segue into other varieties of bodily reflex.

In a move that is particularly useful for our purposes, Williams extends her argument about S/M porn's portrayal of involuntary corporeal paroxysms to the subgenre's use (or potential use) of bodily fluids. In a discussion that encompasses horror, exploitation cinema, and extreme or violent porn, she touches upon the manner in which apparently diverse discourses of authenticity and bodily event can be related back to the pornographic frenzy of the visible. When read in the generic context of adult entertainment as opposed to that of horror, she argues, "a flinch, a convulsion, a welt, even the flow of blood itself, would seem to offer incontrovertible proof that a woman's body, so resistant to the involuntary show of pleasure, has been touched, "moved" by some force" (194).⁶ In this theoretical re-imagining, blood replaces semen as the source of pornography's authenticity effect; whilst the money shot proves (according to the particular

standards and conventions of the genre) that pleasure really has been achieved and experienced, it is posited that blood can also be used to achieve the same effect.

This obviously intersects with our analysis of the use of facial fluids within pornographic depictions of irrumatio. By dwelling upon the generation and profusion of these abject excretions – by presenting the very moment of their emergence in graphic detail and loving close-up – gagging porn provides its viewers with a kind of proof that the woman's body has really experienced something. The deliberate foregrounding of snotty noses, saliva-smeared mouths, and watering eyes is nothing if not an attempt to show that the female performer has been moved by some irresistible sexual force. As Williams states,

Hard core desires assurance that it is witnessing not the voluntary performance of feminine pleasure, but its involuntary confession. The woman's ability to fake the orgasm that the man can never fake (at least according to certain standards of evidence) seems to be at the root of all the genre's attempts to solicit what it can never be sure of: the out-of-control confession of pleasure, a hard-core "frenzy of the visible". (50)

In the case of gagging porn, the female body's involuntary confession acquires a visual language of its own. Via the exchange of orgasm and vaginal wetness for retching and facial discharges, the authentic experiences of the female body are rendered cinematically legible. Indeed, not only do the fluids triggered and extracted by irrumatio possess the requisite spectacular quality demanded by the moving image form but, crucially, they also read as (sufficiently) convincing within porn's ocular economy.

We have established, then, that the generic function of the cum shot can be usurped by alternative authenticating fluids, be these blood or saliva. By appearing convincing, and indeed by simply appearing (that is, by yielding to capture by the lens), these fluids provide gagging porn with an appropriate representational strategy for addressing one of contemporary adult entertainment's biggest generic challenges. Where facial secretions arguably have the advantage over a substance like blood, however, is that they can be easily inserted into porn's existing aesthetic repertoire and can operate within the adult industry's mainstream. The flow of real blood from real injuries should

by no means be considered a significant part of the contemporary mainstream pornographic landscape; in my experience, such fluids have extremely limited visibility outside of non-niche adult entertainment, and even certain dedicated S/M sites will avoid things like blood and needle-play on the grounds that they are "distasteful or dangerous" (Mooallem 6).⁷

The kind of specialist S/M content that does depict "the flow of blood itself" (Williams 194), meanwhile, is often markedly distinct from gonzo in terms of audience, aesthetics, and content; indeed, we could argue that it is at the other end of the pornographic spectrum, displaying a fundamentally divergent understanding of what counts as sexual activity. In his essay "'Choke on it Bitch!': Porn Studies, Extreme Gonzo and the Mainstreaming of Hardcore," Stephen Maddison identifies a tendency within contemporary gonzo to ignore the traditional "progression from arousal and foreplay, through to penetration and orgasm" in favour of "mechanized cycles of penetration" that are organized "solely according to the logic of penile stimulation, by hand, mouth, vagina or anus, and multiple combinations thereof" (49). Gonzo pornography, Maddison argues, is preoccupied by the act of penetration to the exclusion of all other forms of sexual behaviour.

S/M pornographies, meanwhile, are less concerned with this kind of sexual activity, often eschewing scenes of penetration altogether. R. D. K. Herman argues that

Although by definition BDSM has sexual connotations, it is important to note that BDSM practices are not necessarily directly sexual and BDSM "scenes" may involve little or nothing that would be defined as sexual activity (genital stimulation). Instead, the defining characteristic is the power exchange whereby one person willingly relinquishes some degree of control over his or her body to another person. (92)

Linda Williams agrees, stating that BDSM-themed porn "often displaces the display of genital sex onto elaborate scenarios of punishment" (303). The representation of blood-play within S/M pornography, then, is quite separate from the gonzo material that today makes up adult entertainment's mainstream;⁸ so much so, in fact, that it typically displaces not only convulsions

and fluids, but also genital sex itself. Whilst blood may have the capacity to operate as an authenticating fluid, it can do so only within very limited contexts and for very niche audiences.

Whereas the conventions surrounding the depiction of blood may be somewhat at odds with the norms of contemporary porno, however, the representation of facial fluids fits into a more accepted and widely disseminated set of practices. These fluids are presented as the direct result of oral sex – the blow job, of course, has enjoyed a particularly high degree of generic visibility since the release of *Deep Throat* in 1972 – and stem from the penetration of an existing orifice rather than relying upon the creation of new bodily openings via the cutting of skin. This means that the pornographic portrayal of irrumatio can exploit the transgressive frisson attached to the gendered dynamics of force, pleasure, and power, whilst at the same time retaining a useful distance from the kinds of violence that the wider culture is quickest to condemn as criminal or pathological.

The emissions of the face also have the advantage of sharing certain visual qualities with semen. As we have seen, the secretions of the nose and throat often display a similar viscosity and opacity to male ejaculatory fluid, whilst their colouration and placement (around the mouth and over the face) roughly approximates the aesthetics of the cum shot. Indeed, these two sets of abject fluids – penile and facial – can at times be seen to merge as part of a pornographic focus upon wetness, both within specialist gagging films and within those more general works of gonzo hard core which incorporate irrumatio. Rocco Siffredi's *Rocco: Animal Trainer 8*, for example, uses rough deep throating and gagging as part of its wider generic repertoire, and provides a particularly clear example of how moistness might be displaced from the interior of the vagina to the more visually accessible location of the skin. In scene 3, for example, sweat and copious amounts of baby oil combine with the by-products of irrumatio to create a general aesthetics of wetness that is not limited to the cum shot; specks of moisture even appear on the camera lens at some points as Siffredi and his co-star Laura Orsoia perform.

What is crucial here is that the use of facial fluids offers visually decipherable evidence that the female bodily interior really *has* been moved and affected by a sexual act, but unlike blood, this evidence operates within the familiar and generically readable aesthetic perimeters of the money shot. This, of course, has its own limitations and raises its own questions; in attempting to visualize the stimulation undergone by the female performer's body according to those conventions

typically applied to external penile ejaculation, the "truth" of feminine sexual experience is reduced to a facsimile of male pleasure. This is something that the film scholar Tanya Krzywinska picks up on in her essay "The Dynamics of Squirting: Female Ejaculation and Lactation in Hardcore Film." Discussing the lactation porn film *Erupting Volcanoes*, she notes that

Within hardcore the male come-shot is an undeniable sign of authentic sexual pleasure and here lactation is subject to the same paradigm (this is of course a male genital paradigm). The imposition of this framework on the lactating woman tempers the radical and powerful otherness of the mother's body and the mother's desire again disappears off-scene. (36)

With gagging as with lactation, the sensations of the female body are contained within adult entertainment's existing generic framework, resulting in little more than the mirroring of male sexual mechanics.⁹ Whilst the pornographic use of facial fluids as an extension of, or stand-in for, the cum shot may be traced back to an interest in the authentic sexual experiences of the female body, then, it ultimately fails to make any advance in its attempts to screen female affect.

Conclusion: Future Directions for Theories of Gagging Porn

In this article, I have argued that the fluids elicited by irrumatio and focussed upon within gagging pornographies operate as a prefiguration, extension, and displacement of the conventional cum shot, which is itself a fetishistic substitute for a female orgasm which remains perniciously resistant to photorealistic forms of representation. The abject secretions emitted from the faces of female performers are, I have argued, subject to a double displacement, as the attempt to engage with the experiences of the woman's body are diverted or re-routed through the existing generic conventions for representing pleasure in porn. My critical response differs from many popular approaches to the subgenre in that it positions the representation of gagging in pornography not so much as an unambiguous demonstration of male brute force, but as a relatively complex (not to mention unstable) strategy for externalizing and making visual the female performer's sensations and affects – sensations and affects which would otherwise be illegible according to the generic conventions of adult entertainment.

It is entirely understandable that critics should interpret (and condemn) the representation of gagging and irrumatio within porn according to the manner in which it seems to use and abuse female performers, and propagate damaging ideas about the acceptability of the sexual mistreatment of women by men. Certainly, the acts depicted do not typically read as enjoyable for the women involved, and the manner in which gagging porn is marketed stresses a deliberate disinterest in (or hostility towards) catering to female pleasure. The marketing copy for the Italian gagging release *Fuck Her Throat #2* (n.d.), for example, states "There tears become lubrication for the next ram into their faces. Who gives a fuck if they can breathe... (*sic*)" (*Hot Movies*). This displays an overt disregard for women's comfort, let alone pleasure, and it is important that feminist critics pick up on and respond to the obvious revelling in misogyny that such texts represent.

Nonetheless, as this article has shown, gagging porn can be said to be (indirectly, circuitously) preoccupied by the challenges posed by capturing female pleasure and/as the frenzy of the visible. This is perhaps reflected by the following remark from Gail Dines, made in the context of her discussion about the lack of empathy and respect male performers demonstrate towards their female co-stars:

The only time men [in pornography] moan, grunt, or writhe is when they are about to ejaculate; the rest of the time they methodically thrust their penises into the woman's orifices with a look of deep concentration on their faces. This can get very bizarre, especially in an oral sex scene where a stoic man gags a woman by thrusting his penis deep in her mouth, yet she is the only one having orgasmic responses.¹⁰
(xxiv)

It is no coincidence, I think, that Dines should note that only gagging porn's female performers should exhibit the signs of sexual excitement;¹¹ if my thesis regarding the displacements enacted by gagging porn is correct, then we must acknowledge that much of this subgenre is really *about* the body of the woman. The man – the figure that this type of pornography apparently seeks to celebrate and serve – is of secondary importance; it is *her* pseudo-orgasmic response, and her bodily fluids, which ultimately seem to be most compelling.

This essay is indebted less to the anti-pornography polemics of people like Dines than it is to work currently being undertaken within cultural studies – particularly in the field of Porn Studies. There is already some excellent material seeking to address the challenges posed by attempting to visualize the fluids of female arousal, including essays by Tanya Krzywinska, Deborah Shamoon, and Eugenie Brinkema. However, there is still more to be done. My own article leaves many questions unanswered, particularly when it comes to the effect of sexual orientation upon the content and spectatorial pleasures of gagging porn. It should be noted that the representation of irrumatio and gagging are not exclusively reserved for girl-on-guy scenes; Tom Bolt Media's specialist gay line *Gag the Fag*, for example, is now on its sixth instalment, whilst Killergram's *European Bitch Funkers VII* incorporates depictions of choking and gagging into scenes between women.

Whilst gagging may be most visible within heterosexual porn cultures, then, it also has a presence within non-hetero adult entertainment, and this presence needs to be addressed. How do these kinds of movies problematize the idea of facial fluids as a stand in for the cum shot, or relate to theories about irrumatio's attempts to articulate a frenzy of the visible? Is this material simply an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of the hetero version of the subgenre, or does it have its own traditions and its own aesthetics? In what ways might gendered identifications be said to operate within non-heterosexual gagging porn, and how does the staging of gagging scenarios within lesbian pornography utilize and subvert ideas of the phallus? All of these questions suggest that this kind of porn should be explored in order to ascertain whether it can offer us a new perspective on irrumatio and gagging. As this article has demonstrated, gagging porn is far from the reductive and monolithic demonstration of violence against women that many have supposed it to be. Now we need to go further in our attempts to interrogate, problematize, and perhaps queer, a practice that seems at first glance like little more than a hyperbolic demonstration of gendered aggression.

Notes

- ¹ Linda Williams uses this term as part of her comparison of pornography and the movie musical, during which she suggests that numbers are something like bodily spectacles which function "as events themselves within the larger structure" of the filmic text (130).

- ² Compare this to "Cum-eating," with a relatively meagre 55 entries, or "Glory Holes" with 54 titles. Interestingly, "Cunnilingus," an act often prominently absent from general gonzo fare, does considerably better even than gagging, with a total of 3919 dedicated entries.
- ³ It has a limited presence within avant garde cinema and art video installations – see "Hoist," Matthew Barney's contribution to the 2006 collection of art shorts *Destricted*, for example – but pornography is the chief vehicle for representing male ejaculate within contemporary visual culture.
- ⁴ The exception being tears which, Kristeva suggests, do not have "any polluting value" (71).
- ⁵ The role of the "creampie" – in which an internal ejaculation is made visible as it seeps out of the female bodily interior – is interesting here, and the way in which it speaks to a concern with the visualization of female sexual pleasure remains to be explored. I am indebted to Michael O'Rourke for bringing this idea to my attention.
- ⁶ Indeed, the eighteenth-century thinker Adam Smith suggests that pain "is a more pungent sensation than pleasure" (53), and may therefore be easier to communicate and to discern. If "our sympathy with pain, though it falls greatly short of what is naturally felt by the sufferer, is generally a more lively and distinct perception than our sympathy with pleasure" (53), then suffering may be a more efficient and successful vehicle for a generalized frenzy of the visible.
- ⁷ This quote is taken from an article in the *New York Times* about Peter Acworth, then head of the BDSM porn site *Kink.com*, whose company developed a list of self-imposed taboos and prohibitions against types of content.
- ⁸ As Maddison notes, gonzo is "increasingly replacing the high-budget narrative features that dominated the hardcore market in the 1990s and early 2000s" (38).
- ⁹ Krzywinska makes a similar point in relation to porn's attempt to visualize female ejaculations: "The relocation of ejaculation to the vagina, as opposed to the conventional penis, is to make it work as a specular index of pleasure and desire, but most importantly making the female orgasm visible" (40).
- ¹⁰ This statement is somewhat overbroad in its generalizations; some male porn stars, including Rocco Siffredi, can be very vocal in terms of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions of desire.
- ¹¹ Although, admittedly, the responses of female performers in gagging pornography are often muffled by the acts they are performing.

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Creative Aproduction: Mucous and the Blank

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This article will be catalysed by mucous in order to think a form of abstracted queer ahuman "heterosexuality". As mucous is neither gendered nor emitted from a specific corporeal site, it is effulgent, viscous emergence without finitude. The article will suggest that a hitherto fluidic symbol of finitude – male ejaculate – can be liberated from the conceptual apprehension conveyed in its nomenclature through the figure of the vasectomised male body. We argue that a comingling of abstract feminine fluid and male fluid abstracted from its need for spermatozoa content is a creative act which avoids the foils of heterosexuality's resonance with reproduction, both of act and human procreation. This is a radical anti-breeder project seeking to liberate the ecosophical chaos, the virtual potentiality of all interrelated elements of life in nature, from the parasite of the human and its continuation, in a broader sense, vasectomised ejaculate affirms an ahuman sexuality which demands a confrontation with the horror of the non- or anti-breeder male, and with the act of love for the *chaosium*, a mucosal plane formed of intermixed feminine fluid and the discharge of potent blanks.

Whatever "fluid" ultimately comes from the penis, its various manifestations have most often been reduced to a nomenclatorial object, a demarcated, singular phenomenon which extricates it from its relation with other elements and with the fluidity that would identify it for its metamorphic rather than atrophied and thus symbolic or even iconic status. This occurs in two ways. First, the "money shot" refines the molecular, fractured multiplicity of spatter to a single signifier of outcome or production, in spite of its genesis in spasm and schizophrenic flux which begins far in advance of its visually apprehensible emergence and continues beyond its final perceptible globularity. The cultural imagination of semen as a visible substance centres around its appearance on skin, hands, breasts, faces: white, shiny and sticky, it is reduced to spectacle, its mucosal tangibility put to service within the economy of the specular.

Second, semen is understood frequently as a collection of hard-headed and intentional little wills in the form of spermatozoa, in spite of their only composing between two and five percent of the fluid (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semen>) in whatever apocryphal phenomenon one calls an "average male". Here lies the fantasy of familiar little figures dancing within a Petri dish, magnified for our scrutiny, subjected to the processes of identification, and rendered semen according to the human (il)logic of anthropomorphism and homogenisation. Resonant with this over-privileging of the notion of "population" to the fluid is the common ascription of the fluid's origin as in the testes. In fact, only the spermatozoa are produced there; the seminal vesicle, prostate and bulbourethral glands are also crucial facilitators of semen production, however, these organs have been deferred, subjugated to the organisation of masculinity around the testes.

Even in the most generic encyclopaedic definitions of semen, each other element of seminal fluid – from the chemical compounds, amino acids, enzymes and antigens to the mucous – is defined via its assigned function to facilitate the life, energy, mobility and thus goal orientation of the sperm. Semen, therefore, is regarded simply as a facilitator and is only in extremely rare circumstances considered uncoupled from this reproductive aim. While sperm does offer an impasse in its multiplicity within the solidification of ejaculate, it nonetheless remains, in spite of its microscopic plenitude, culturally overrepresented as a smooth, rounded, microcosmic phallus with a tail, perpetuating the persistent visualisation of pleasure through objects, surfaces and enclosed forms.

This operation goes against philosophies of vitalism and the call to thought as opposed to knowledge, the latter acting as a corrupting excavation toward annihilation. Leonard Lawlor states:

the ground must never resemble what it grounds. If the ground resembles, if it is copied off what it grounds, then we have used precisely what we are trying to explain in the explanation. Instead of resemblance, we must conceive the relation between the two poles, we must conceive the *écart*, as conflict. As conflict, the interweaving, the "folding over" becomes "the unfold"; the "place" becomes "spacing"; the milieu becomes the "nonplace". (2006, p. 146)

Through Michel Serres we are reminded that this conflict is not antagonistic; rather, it buttresses necessary differences within and between each other, allowing each specificity and the specificity

of combinations temporally and temporarily, and avoiding stable or final categorisations. Serres writes: "When encounters and connections occur, bodies are characterized according to their resistance" (2000, p. 5). Making sperm resonate with the phallic head, giving both an object of desire (egg and aperture), a function, and directing pleasure toward the finitude of the money shot, all come together to create a relationship of proportionality between sperm and phallus. This correspondence repudiates any possible liberation in the plenitude, frequent deformity and alternate swimming trajectories that many sperm exhibit; the cultural fantasy of perfectly formed and functional "little men" leaves no place for abnormal sperm morphology or sluggish swimmers. Luce Irigaray asks: "Isn't the subjection of sperm to the imperatives of reproduction alone symptomatic of a pre-eminence historically allocated to the solid (product)?" (1985, p. 113). The possibility of a child continues the zones of resonance between: the wilful solid, hard sperm; the intentional and turgid phallus; the production of a new subjectivity through reproduction; and the paradigmatic privileging of associated elements of the visual, the demarcated and the reified as the driving tenets of phallogocentrism, the grounds of which notoriously produce what orients them in an elliptical rhetoric that vindicates its power – another hard-headed effect.

Lee Edelman has vehemently argued that the image of the futuristic Child (a figure of fantasy rather than reality) structures not only the social but also necessarily the political:

That logic compels us, to the extent that we would register as politically responsible, to submit to the framing of political debate – and, indeed, of the political field – as defined by the terms of what he describes as reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privileging of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations. (2004, p. 2)

This "reproductive futurism" is seen across all forms of socio-cultural discourse: literature, party politics, science, media, philosophy, psychology. Edelman attests that as a defining structure it has been used to maintain damaging definitions of "correct" or "good" desire and to refute all political and ethical perspectives that do not ultimately revolve around this imaginary figure. Building upon this, it also serves to configure certain types of corporeal experiences as valid and others as invalid,

including those around male/female couplings that may actively refute the reproductive aim. Although Edelman is primarily concerned with the place of homosexuality within politics and culture, and whilst his polemical call for queerness to celebrate its equation with “the social order’s death drive” (2004, p. 3) is certainly problematic to some extent, the concept of reproductive futurism remains useful because it offers an insight into the structural processes that still dominate thinking about sexual difference and the place of gendered bodies. The call to embrace the previously denigrated “ascription of negativity to the queer” within heteronormative culture (2004, p. 4) posits the denial of reproductive futurity and the making of the male body infertile as deliberate acts and creative choices. Additionally, it raises the frequently disavowed possibility of a future not only without the Child as idealised symbol or “perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics” (2004, p. 3) but also without humanity in any form at all, symbolic or otherwise. Reproductive futurity assumes the perpetuation of the human race as an unquestionable given and an intractable ethical imperative. Aproduction argues that these assumptions are crucially flawed and that challenging them remains one of the most pressing concerns for philosophical thought.

This may also be thought in relation to Felix Guattari’s ecosophy, a new ethico-political claim that recognises the need to reinvent collective and individual practices within the realms of social relations, human subjectivity (or mental ecology) and the environment. Guattari affirms, “[m]ental ecosophy will lead us to reinvent the relation of the subject to the body, to phantasm, to the passage of time, to the “mysteries of life and death” (2004, p. 24) The image of the child that dominates reproductive futurism is indeed a totalising phantasm that haunts majoritarian notions of corporeality and temporality, aiming to satisfy the narcissistic humanist demand to live forever through the continuation of both specific familial genealogies and the human race as a whole. True engagement with and take responsibility within this ecosophical example requires a paradigmatic shift in how culture and society view human subjectivity and human sexuality through the prism of reproduction; it calls for the need to “kick the habit of sedative discourse” (Guattari, 2004, p. 29). For this reason, the act of producing an infertile male body may be seen not as a “reduction”, but as part of a process of reinvention that lies at the heart of the ecosophical project. Via this logic then, if we cut off the equivalences between spermatozoa and the penis, we are left with a different kind of organ, where the fluidity of ejaculate is not premised on sperm but on its singularity without utility, potentialisation of reproduction, or equivalence with the orientations of the phallic structuration of masculinity.

Irigaray asks: "Must we then understand this modelling function – more or less hidden from view – of the object of desire as resulting from the passage, a successful one, from the fluid to the solid state? The object of desire itself, and for psychoanalysts would be the transformation of fluid to solid" (1985, p. 113). Aristotle's observations about semen in *The Generation of Animals* confirm Irigaray's assertion and further elucidate the dynamics that emerge in relation to fluids, solids and the rethinking of sexual difference outside binary schemata. A perhaps surprising amount of space in Aristotle's text is devoted to the exploration of the nature and purpose of seminal fluid, and there certainly seems to be some investment in the distinction and elevation of this bodily secretion over all others. After ruminating at length Aristotle comes to the conclusion that semen may be described as "part of a useful residue" deriving from a fluid (1943, p. 80), placing the onus upon its co-option into utility above all else. Further entrenching his subject within the rigid binary of the mechanics of reproduction, he draws an equivalence between semen and menstrual blood: "Thus much then is evident: the menstrual fluid is a residue, and it is the analogous thing in females to the semen in males" (p. 95).

Such a clumsy equivalence occludes any possibility of the non-reproductive mixing of seminal mucous with cervical mucous and ignores the potentialities of desire and pleasure that such mucosal minglings bring into effect; instead, it affixes heterosexual bodies and their secretions into one oppositional framework that remains resolutely gendered and functional. Aristotle's further assertion that the crucial difference between semen and menstrual fluid is that the semen acts as a vehicle for as the "sentient 'Soul'" (p. lxvii) works to organise these genders hierarchically. Although he may acknowledge fluidity in terms of origins, the conceptual passage from fluid to solid that Irigaray observes as a both a primary function and foundational desire of phallogocentric thought is clearly apparent in Aristotle's text. For him, semen is hot, shiny and white, but also "coherent" (1943, p. 161). Whilst he uses this word to refer to the material properties of viscosity and texture, it also carries further connotations of fixed taxonomy and stable signification. In order to rethink ejaculate and the non-reproductive heterosexual encounter outside hierarchical and oppositional frameworks, such notions of "coherent", stabilised meanings and pre-determined endings must be cast aside, leaving space for an agendered form of masculine corporeality based around fluidity.

Utilising a physics of fluids to think through desire understands male ejaculate differently, "[t]he flux of the atomic insemination flows by the feminine clinamen" (Serres, 2000, p. 39). The very premise of bodily fluids most immediately invokes Julia Kristeva's work on abjection. In Leviticus, semen is unclean:

When a man has an emission of semen, he must bathe his whole body with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Any clothing or leather that has semen on it must be washed with water, and it will be unclean till evening. When a man has sexual relations with a woman and there is an emission of semen, both of them must bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening. (15:16–18)

However, Kristeva claims that "neither tears nor sperm, for example, although they belong to the borders of the body, have any polluting value" (1982, p. 71). While the value of evening in purifying the polluting effects of fluids remains enigmatic, there is a clear impasse between what seminal fluid is and what it contains; the semantics of language (beyond the scope of this article) in reference to this understanding, and various translations of "sperm" and "semen" can broadly be classified as the bifurcation between solid and fluid.

This also emphasises the cultural fantasies invested in the imaginings of sperm, as it is doubtful that the hyper-glorification of the visually-manifested money shot in pornography is one which directly apprehends each sperm and would thereby constitute a world where the greatest virility was measured not on the rigidity or size of the penis but upon the plethora and directionality of one's sperm. Again we see an impasse which shows the confounding nature of the conflict between semen and its content (or lack thereof): the purpose of the money shot is to transform pleasure to solid evidence; desire for the woman converts into desire for the evidence which authenticates the pleasure. The function of sperm in pornography is rendered defunct; the proximity of sperm to the uterus is an anathema to the privileging of its visual incarnation contrasted against whatever makes it most conceptually, and therefore impossible to be actually, reproductively virile. Put simply, if the money shot is outside of the cervix, the function of insemination for reproduction is unlikely. This impasse points towards paradoxical cultural fantasies concerning the positionality of semen – its interiority and exteriority in relation to the body. In order for the apparent goal to be achieved, semen must remain always inside, moving between the

male body and the female body without providing specular evidence of its existence. Yet this specular evidence is precisely what is demanded and must be repeatedly provided in cultural representations.

These many circles of atrophying fluidities of pleasure, secretions, mucous and flow, and their subordination to the solid and its associated visualisation, suggest that the attempt to exploit the fluidity of male sexuality and semen-ality hinges primarily on strategies of extrication and demarcation – between the sexes, between bodies, and within the fluids which, by their very fluidity, threaten the mechanics of solids which perpetuate phallogocentrism. Irigaray, Kristeva and Leviticus all defer to the conundrum that, according to Murat Aydemir, “sperm can apparently be both clean and dirty, and, moreover, can take part in an immanent rapture that can be “in-joyed”, yet not known” (207, p. xxii). But there is an ethical implication in this argument which may shift it toward a more radical vitalism still – a vitalism that concerns itself with life as it is rather than the lives to be. What happens when, rather than oscillating between the ambiguities of sperm being both clean and unclean, phallic and multiple, we remove sperm altogether? Is sperm perhaps a useful “solid” to extricate in order to explore both a sexually fluid male pleasure and a queer heterosexuality denied any residual phantasies of reproductive potential?

Sperm can be seen to parasite the far greater volume of non-sperm fluid which surrounds it, just as the constantly reproducing human population parasites the host earth. Serres states:

in its very life and by its practices the parasite routinely confuses use and abuse; it accords itself rights, which it exercises by harming its host, sometimes without any advantage for itself. The parasite would destroy the host without realising it. Neither use nor exchange has value in its eyes, for it appropriates things – one could say that it steals them – prior to use or exchange: It haunts and devours them. The parasite is always abusive. ... For parasitism, in fact, follows the simple arrow of a flow moving in one direction but not the other, in the exclusive interest of the parasite, which takes everything and gives back nothing in this one-way street. (2002, p. 36)

Particularly in the case of heterosexual intercourse which is adverse to reproduction, the sperm as parasite both haunts the flows of pleasure and gains no benefit for itself. Sperm as possible catalyst for reproduction does not simply abuse the semen as a product of orgasm but turns it into a product. Semen has no necessary relation with orgasm, nor with its precursory fluids and subsequent dribbles. Sperm and the intentionality of orgasm makes objects of both semen and desire, parasiting pleasure, atrophying the sensitive epithelium male genital area into host to phallic phantasies and the testicles into the site of masculine organisation. the common characterisation of their single flow of desire to object, their sexual aim, and their goal of orgasm and occasionally production of a human results from the ways in which sperm has come to be the primary microcosmic template in the resonant macrocosmic cultural homogenisation of heterosexual intercourse based on paradigms of single focus, aim, goal, direction and production. This disregards the myriad constellations of infinite potentials and intensities this rather ordinary act can catalyse. Sperm are indeed the little homunculi of the parasitic human they may assist in developing.

Rather than configure the extinction of sperm and humans as nihilistic, however, finitude advocates dissolution of the obsession with eternity through reproduction and simultaneously forges what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call unnatural participations: "combinations neither genetic nor structural; they are interkingdoms, unnatural participations. That is the only way Nature operates – against itself" (1987, p. 242). While, arguably, heterosexual sexual encounters involving what would ordinarily be understood as "normal" sex has the potential to be thought without grounding within reproductivity, majoritarian reproductive tenets will always move to colonise. By taking away this very possibility through the active and deliberate choice to vasectomise the male body, many of those elements associated with phallogocentrism, production and object desire are revoked – the penis no longer phallus, seminality without sperm, castration, female objectification displaced, pleasure no longer subjected to orgasm, antagonism toward the orgasm defined purely through productive value dispersed. It is a question, then, of liberating semen from the parasitical and symbolic constraints which have been placed upon it philosophically and representationally, and exploring the new possibilities that open up for heterosexual desire in the context of this previously unthought corporeality.

"Both heterosexuality and homosexuality are the precarious outcome of a desire which knows no name. If the distinction between biology and psychology thus disappears, it is because desire knows nothing of the separation between body and mind upon which the personality is founded" (Hocquenghem, 1993, p. 75). Guy Hocquenghem reminds us of Guattari's emphatic claim that "desire is constituted before the crystallization of the body and the organs, before the division of the sexes, before the separation between the familiarized self and the social field" (1996, p. 153). Temporality haunts seminality and futilely attempts to colonise and master desire. Hocquenghem describes sexuality itself as a tentative negotiatory practice of discursively wrangling the dissipative fluidity of desire. Desire for Hocquenghem, as it is for Guattari, comes before any speech and will therefore always remain in excess of discourse, taking desire as before, beyond and thus entirely outside the temporalisation of libidinality. This temporality can be understood variously as the narrativisation: of sexuality; of sexual subjectivity as psychologically, biologically and psychoanalytically incremental; of sexual acts as unfurling in time; of projects of obsession, romance and seduction; or of the development of thought in the theorisation of desire. Sexuality gives desire an outcome, sexuality thus is its own money shot of desire, subjugating desire to a subjectivity with an object and limiting its affects through temporality, insinuating causality.

Time, of course, can flow either way – "I desire, therefore I will act thus" can also be "I acted thus because of my predetermined sexuality". Time limits desire to excavation, thought to knowledge, imagination to reason and ejaculate to the sexually orgasmic and fertilising narrative. A fertile heterosexual will always be a heterosexual, a fertile homosexual will always be a potential heterosexual breeder, but an infertile heterosexual is not necessarily a heterosexual for they are removed from this confining structural framework of temporalisation and futuristic intentionality. "Desire is always 'outside' ... Once there's heterosexuality ... there's no more desire" (Guattari, 1996, p. 59). Sexuality is the desire for an outcome and is entirely estranged from desire in any way related to pleasure or libidinality. However, in perhaps a perverse turn, we wish to return to a claim which reminds the body that it is a body, in that certain kinds of desiring interaction can result in insemination and possibly birth.

As corporeal diagrammes without permanent structure and much to the disappointment of postmodernity in general, there are some bodies which adamantly deny majoritarianism, which are loath to identify simply as heterosexual but which ascribe their desire to the world of Guattari's

asemiosis. Yet, nonetheless, the desirous flows of these bodies result in the act of vaginal-penile intercourse, which can lead to the possibility of fertilisation. Possibility attends to the finitude of any outcome: fertility phantasises reproduction; infertility guarantees potentiality, and what is produced is a germinal unfurling of desiring bodies in an encounter. Politically, the majoritarian should be responsible for addressing oppressive practices and active in non-co-optive or fetishistic becomings-minoritarian. If we seek to liberate desire from time, we must also liberate the politics of sexuality, which would mean seeking a sexual theory that engages with pre-subjective, pre-majoritarian/minoritarian bifurcation. Sadly, certain attempts have resulted in reifying the very statuses that these admirable aims seek to deconstruct;¹ however, some volatile results have occurred in the new straight queer (see e.g., Thomas, Aimone and McGillivray, 2000).

Actively making oneself infertile challenges the unseen but spectrally enormous element of the phallus as ultimately productive and heterosexual vaginal intercourse as in the service of this production. Defiant and celebratory acts of becoming sperm-free necessitate a rethinking of heterosexual intercourse in its new role in queer theory, or as a minoritarian practice. It also means that heterosexual acts are truly delivered from their biological reminders. In contrast, minoritarian sexual politics remain plagued – no matter how queer heterosexual acts imagine themselves – with the practicalities of contraception. Infertile semen potentially relate only to the social issues associated with disease when it has been redeemed from its fecundity. Michael Johnson Jr. identifies what he calls the “ejaculation imperative” in the realm of heterosexuality, homosexuality and, most importantly, homosociality, which functions as a mandate by which masculinity is judged, whereby “the superficially seeming, innocuous physiological function becomes powerfully equated with the masculine ideal” (2010, p. 239).

The relationship between ejaculate and homosexuality, from “jerk circles” to barebacking, is beyond the scope of this work. However, resonant with homophobic, anxiety-driven biopolitical discourses, heterosexual sperm-free semen – now without the possibility of fertilisation – belongs to the realm of disease alone and for that reason is abjected from its sacred signification. The privileging of the visual is also shared in both the heterosexual and the homosexual overvaluation of semen; the vindication of non-fertile semen may redeem it somewhat from this privileging of the visual, however, through the tactical use of the act of heterosexual intercourse. Pragmatically, in heterosexual intercourse, the more likely fertilisation is, the less likely one is to see the spectacle of

ejaculation. We utilise these somewhat awkward details not to bring a template of heterosexual intercourse into some kind of redemption as being the queerest of new queers, but simply in order to remind us that the very quietest, ordinary and most default of acts accepted as normal by society actually goes against many phallogocentric imperatives when enacted between two bodies as coupled intensities (rather than performative spectacles).

Desiring acts and activities cannot be thought without recourse to the body, nor would we wish them to be. Irigaray beautifully attempts to negotiate the residual physiological inevitabilities within desire in her shift from the use of the term "sexual" to "sexuate" difference. She states:

I use the term 'sexuate' rather than 'sexual' in order to avoid the all too frequent confusion between sexuate identity and sexual choice. Sexuate identity is more basic and it is more determined by birth than sexual choice. It is determined by both the morphology of the body and the relational environment which goes with this body ... it implies making love either inside or outside one's own body and with a specific relationship with mucous and engendering ... In any case, the fact that sexuate identity is both connected to the body and a relational context ensures that is from the beginning both nature and culture, a culture that is or not, appropriate to one's own nature and that thereby favours or prevents the growth and blossoming of this nature. (2008, p. 142)

Irigaray evokes a term which is returning to philosophy, liberated from its associations with biological essentialism, which is now acknowledged as always having functioned on the cultural co-option of imagined absolutes in order to vindicate power dissymmetry. Through the notion of "sexuate identity" and "sexuate difference", she offers a means of thinking desire and the corporeal experiences of desire that can remain anchored in the body. Neither do they become lost in abstraction or subjected to physical determinism. "Sexuate" assists in the conceptualisation of heterosexual intercourse as removed from the imperatives of a culture obsessed with oppositional identities and driven by the fantasy of the complementary relationship of sperm-and-egg and testes-and-uterus.

This term is biology which escapes knowledge, which evinces that the world, like desire, is before, beyond and atemporally in excess of our capacity to apprehend it. It may be the subject of science; it is certainly the host to the human parasite; it is Nature. "Nature is reduced to human nature, which is reduced to either history or reason. The world has disappeared ... Curiously, reason acquires in the legal sphere a status quite similar to the one it had acquired in the sciences: the laws are always on its side because it founds law" (Serres, 2002, p. 35). In the contemporary desire to rectify some of the damage perpetrated by humanity, to turn our address to ecological and environmental issues, welfare and the redistribution of freedom, we still fail to allow natural law (which we still identify as external to the human, yet only we demarcate, separate and define externality) to govern, because natural law must be resonant with human logic. For the human, a law of nature is unthinkable. Nature itself in its current conception is a phantasy precisely because it is inconceivable; as Serres states, the world does not exist. We champion the vasectomised body – indeed, what could be simpler for allowing the world to exist, than the cessation of human life within it?

Sexuate identity, as Irigaray claims, has an intimate relationship with mucous. It is a constitutive factor of a relationship between bodies where that relation can be described as mucous. She states:

a genesis of love between the sexes has yet to come about, in either the smallest or the largest sense, or in the most intimate or political guise. It is a world to be created or recreated so that man and woman may once more or finally live together, meet, and sometimes inhabit the same place. ... It is a threshold unto mucosity. Beyond the classic opposites of love and hate, liquid and ice lies this perpetual half open threshold, consisting of lips that are strangers to dichotomy" (1992, pp. 174, 175).

The absence of reproductivity and semen as mucosal consistency constituted by different elements in one fluid offers proximity without likeness, phallogocentric colonisation and the reduction of all to economies of solids and absences. Irigaray's two lips model – most frequently associated with the vulva and female genital morphology as proliferation, multiplicity and indeterminacy, the viscosity of which is that of mucous – can enjoy here an unusual and unnatural participation with male genitalia and sperm-less semen. The penis has its own multiple labiality, just one example

being in the fraenum's meeting with the corona, the site which produces mucous and which contains the aperture. The morphology of folds and fissures commonly associated with the feminine is ablated by the organizing principles of solidification in phallic operations. But the more refined and minute elements of male morphology, like the voluminous multiple impotence of semen without sperm, open out their fleshy folds to infinity.

Georges Bataille's poem "The Penis Hole" emphasises both the *jouissance* and the connectedness of a dephallicised penis to all erotogenising, morphological sites: "The penis hole is laughter / and the ass crack the dawn" (2004, p. 73). One of his Archangelical fragments celebrates "starburst of laughter / morning of great sun" (2004, p. 153), and a poem fragment reads, "I have searched for what we do / when we sacrifice / and climax / and laugh" (p. 82). The image of the laughing orifice, suggestive but not fully defined, recalls the opening and closing of the two sets of two lips in Irigaray as they massage each other in various desirous and joyful configurations: "Two lips kissing two lips: openness is ours again... The passage from the inside out, from the outside in, is limitless ... Are we unsatisfied? Yes, if that means we are never finished. If our pleasure consists of moving, being moved, endlessly" (1985, p. 210). Temporality is suspended and extended, finality is deferred and dismissed.

Bataille's *Divine Filth* frequently oscillates between terror at the jubilation of sex experienced by the atrophied majoritarian male and indulgence in that kind of masculinity's sacrifice in pleasure as a kind of chaotic laughter. Furthermore, it shows a shift from phallus to multi-planed flesh, speech to laughing silence and orgasm as finitude or goal to chance or luck. He describes Zen as the nothingness which neither lacks nor describes nothingness and which is constituted by the coming of luck. In this way, orgasm can be configured so that neither it nor its association with semen are dismissed, while delivering it from its situatedness as the temporal and incremental causal finitude of desire. The penis, configured as planes with mucosal consistency and labial folds, creates a third connection, joining with the feminine labial folds to the lips of the mouth which speak as in-between: where the air connects the interim between two voices, two bodies, two sets of (at least) two; and defined by the voluminous, irresistible connectivity which gives each its unique consistency, and without which each is in solitude and thus without a constituting ethics of difference. Irigaray writes:

Pressed against each other but without any possibility of suture, at least of a real kind, they do not absorb the world either into themselves or through themselves, provided they are not abused or reduced to a mere consummating or consuming structure. Instead their shape welcomes without assimilating or reducing or devouring. (1992, p. 175)

The penis made mucosal and sexuate, and the entirety of male morphology, creates a sympathetic proliferation with feminine lips and speaking lips. Where sperm and the phallus do not reduce and assimilate female sexuality to the economy of one, and an anti-"heterosexual" act of sexuality denies the proliferative folds of femininity for a devouring of all male morphology, the mucosal relations of these many folds of labial flow open out toward infinity, both to nature in an address to the plenitude found in all bodies (and which is robbed from bodies through signifying regimes) and toward the divine in the silence that comes from pleasure which has been delivered from language and its limits, philosophical, biological or social. Irigaray calls such a form of inter-proximity angelic: angels "open up the closed nature of the world" (1992, p. 173) and thus an angelic and mucosal relation is boundless and exultant.

For Irigaray, gesture is the language of angels, and they both reflect fallen carnality – that which awakened the world to sexual difference in the first place – and the sexuality to come – that which is delivered from phallic isomorphism and any moral law of God. Being between these times, any encounter of a mucosal kind must be outside of this between-time as well; thus, mucosal encounters of sexual difference are divine because they are outside of present time and part of a contraction of imagined past and unthought future, in sharp contrast to the predetermined retrospection and anticipation of the semen-as-sperm-and-only-sperm encounter.

Where abjection sees mucous and the corpse belonging to the same order of interim and in-between, Irigaray states instead: "Mucosity ought no doubt to be thought of as linked to the angel, while the inertia of a body deprived of the mucous and the act associated with it is linked to the fallen body or corpse" (1992, p. 174). Against the atrophy of solids found in physics, which stiffens the penis into its own inert *rigor mortis*, structuring sexuality, stemming flows and damming desire, mucosity exploits angelic relations as always in movement even outside of time: "Movement, posture, the coming-and-going between the two. They move – or disturb? – the paralysis or

apatheia of the body or soul, or world. They set trances or convulsions to music, and lend them harmony" (Irigaray, 1992, p. 174).

Semen without sperm is fluid without solid, sex as perturbation, harmony without narrative or regulating melody. Most crucially, it refuses the one symbol which Irigaray sees as representing the "evidence" of the false belief in sexual difference being already in harmony – the child. The spectre of the child haunts and constitutes the spectral elements of sperm. There are no objects produced in the most creative of sexuate relations. With any possibility of the child taking up the symbol of alliance, the sexuate ethics of heterosexual intercourse as being an angelic, unnatural participation are prevented. Like the object icon of the sperm, the phallus and the money shot, reproductivity leading to a symbolic child defers heterosexual sexuate ethics to what is produced in place of the relation.

Configuring male sexuation through a mucosal seminality addresses two issues faced by a sexuate ethics. First, it rejects the overreliance on the feminine to forge and emphasise proximity to the divine and the natural (not in the theistic sense but in the sense that the divine is life liberated from capital, linguistic, theistic and other epistemological regimes). Secondly, it shows an accountability for the detriments and oppressions of phallogocentrism in the need for such mucosal masculinity to emerge.

Semen has come to stand for masculinity, virility, linear temporality and the assurance of pleasure and fulfillment; it is an overdetermined substance theoretically and representationally. Any project that attempts to think seminal fluid anew must guard against replacing these existing cultural fantasies with new and potentially just as restrictive singular meanings; it must stake an adamant refusal to privilege temporalised sexuality over the vicissitudes and imaginative flights of desire. However, Murat Aydemir makes a connection that, when explored in conjunction with our aims in this article, may offer the possibility of semen as asignification which opens up meaning rather than foreclosing it. The whiteness of semen, he notes, has come to the fore in several literary and philosophical musings on the subject, including Bataille's association of semen with the Milky Way in *The Story of the Eye* and Aristotle's designation of this whiteness as playing a primary role in setting it apart from other bodily fluids (2007, p. 12). Whilst Aristotle's association of white with purity is located within a well-documented tradition of philosophical tyranny, whiteness may be

repositioned so as to act not only as the absence of colour, but as a modality which may de-inscribe existing forms of signification. As Aydemir suggests, Jacques Derrida's analysis of Stéphane Mallarmé's work in *Dissemination* opens up an interesting trajectory that intersects with the reconfiguration of semen as blank mucous. Derrida states: "what ruins the 'pious capital letter' of the title and works toward the decapitation or ungluing of the text is the regular intervention of the blanks, the ordered return of the white spaces, the measure and order of dissemination" (2004, p. 193). Lawlor's "'place' becomes 'spacing'" is once more evoked. Whiteness acts not as an assurance of purity or elevation, but as "an active force of erasure, blotting out or whitening the text" (Aydemir, 2007, p. 24). The whiteness of semen bears no relation to its assumed status as reproductive fluid and, indeed, against Aristotle's assertion of this as a unique characteristic, it calls to mind cervical mucosal secretions as much as those of the male, denying the connotations of strictly masculine "purity" or "virility" that would fit neatly within the normative frameworks of sexuality. Instead, from this perspective, the whiteness of mucous taken not as spectacle or as symbol of reproductive force acts as almost as a *tabula rasa* – a de-inscription of existing understandings and the manifestation of white as "a germinal or seminal blank" (Derrida, 2004, p. 194). This germinal blank refers not to any pre-inscribed meaning but, rather, to the potentiality of multiple and open meanings, or to no coherent meaning at all. Whiteness as silence, potentiality and infinite gesture.

Angelic mucous, germinal whiteness and aproductive heterosexuality contribute to an ethics that aims to render redundant the socio-cultural emphasis on reproductive sexuality, goal-oriented masculinity and the futurity of the phantasmic Child. Instead, it strives towards multi-directionality and non-totalization. "At the heart of all ecological praxes there is an a-signifying rupture, in which the catalysts of existential change are close at hand" (Guattari, 2000, p. 30). This article aims to create such a rupture and thus argues for an anti-breeder philosophy that engages with the concerns of ecosophy in formulating a more responsible relationship between nature and culture, critiquing the centrality and privilege that has been given to the category of "the human". To cast aside the ruptured and deformed cadavers of humanist narratives entails not the adoption of new experimental but nonetheless pragmatic prescriptions of sexuality, but the jubilant embracing of a creative and formless desire. From an ethical perspective, the abjection of the blank semen is symbolic of the even more abject concept (even in the queerest circles) of the cessation of reproduction as integral to any actualisation of ecosophy.

In Spinozan ethics self-understanding as meditation on the mind's eternity posits the self and mind as continuously germinal, a perpetual beginning which unravels via multiple trajectories within the mind's multiple intra-affects and their collisions and mutations with the affects of others. The self lacks nothing, it is an eternity in space, without lamentation for imminent death and therefore in no need of a future which is configured via the substitute phantasy of the Child. For Spinoza, will has no absolute beginning, nor any established stasis, nor a perceptible end – it is maintenance as life without inherent qualities or essence. Desire understood as the premise of will in poststructural philosophy is thus constituted in the same way – outside of time and devoid of reducible essence, incapable of reproduction, either of act or object. If what we claim to know as "human" life were to cease, far from a suicidal, extinctionist death, life as immanent living would be irresistible as it would have no alternative, no deferral to an expected coming generation, no future signifier.

The gradual cessation of human life on Earth and in the Universe marks the beginning of the contemplation of the eternity of life affects, of the life of all ecosophical cosmic interaction to which philosophies of desire attend in their association of desire with the divine and with ethics. Encouraging the cessation of human occupation of Earth and space is the opposite of being against life. Human knowledge of life, in a similar manner to human knowledge of sexuality and gender, sacrifices that life, conceptually and actually. Neither are capable of negotiating difference. Life lived knowing we are the last generation of life is life lived accountably and in joy at our micropolitical address of affects – diminishing and expanding – toward making all connectivity of life as liberated from the detrimental effects of human population as possible.

Ethically, this new life, lived in the worlds to which our finitude introduces us, make us live differently; this is life configured in wondrous unthought-of ways that benefit Nature through our becoming more hospitable to difference, including our own which has been co-opted by the law of the human. We are less parasitic, more creative and productive in our libidinal, desiring connections and the opportunities of expressivity we encounter from a world constantly territorialised anew. This begins with the quiet moments of desiring encounters such as heterosexual intercourse which previously occupied the zenith of the maintenance of traditional paradigms of sexuality and gender but now become strange in their orientation toward extinction as the liberation of Nature.

"Never forget the place from which you depart, but leave it behind and join the universal. Love the bond that unites your plot of earth with the earth, the bond that makes kin and stranger resemble each other" (Serres, 2002, p. 50). Resemblance without homogenization, nature as unnatural, and love without structuring relation or condition are subtle, gracious interactions with the earth, earths, life intensities. Extinction destroys nothing, it is everything the earth is left without in the cessation of life as human, and human lives converted to living-ness, in desire, in divine difference. Thinking immanent life extinguishes any obsession with the futurity of extinction, which comes to stand in for the Child if blank semen remains in the realm of the reproductive. Instead, it

brings into being other worlds beyond those of purely abstract information, to engender Universes of reference and existential Territories where singularity and finitude are taken into account by the multivalent logic of mental ecologies and by the group Eros principle of social ecology; to dare to confront the vertiginous Cosmos so as to make it inhabitable; these are the tangled paths of the tri-ecological vision. (Guattari, 2004, p. 67)

Angelic mucosal sexuate ethics open the infinity of the world, *this* world, without the need to replace the heterosexual relations of desire hitherto seen to perpetuate oppression, compulsory reproduction and normativity with an equally structured and possibly recuperative version of transgressive sexuality for its own sake. Heterosexuate ethics shows alterity in all desire which dissipates into desire for this life and this world as Cosmic potentiality.

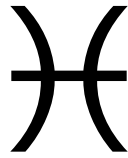
Notes

- ¹ Bob Pease, for example, claims: "We should not leave it to gay men and lesbians alone to deconstruct heterosexuality", yet follows with, "I know that I continue to learn from my gay and lesbian colleagues and friends" (2010, p. 128).

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PART TWO



Being and Slime: An Alluvial Introduction

Karin Sellberg & Kamillea Aghtan

'Dirty', 'messy', 'grubby', 'perverse' and 'disorderly' are the adjectives usually used in relation to secretion of body fluids. Even when spoken of in appreciatory terms, fluidity tends to be 'otherised'; it is appreciated *because* it is messy, abject, strange or queer. The disturbing uncontainability of our body fluids force them either into the realm of the disgusting or the erotically tantalising. They are the perpetual opposites of our firm and graspable corporeality, its peculiar and erratic shadow.

When it comes down to it, there are few things *less* strange than fluidity, however – and this special issue is not another attempt to perpetuate the titillating discourses of 'grubbiness' surrounding it. By focusing on specific fluids in isolation, as well as in patterns of discursive and material fluid exchange – and by problematising the very idea of fluidity in the first place – we hope to come one step closer to the as yet unfathomable 'core' of this elusive matter. We secrete sweat, saliva, urine, blood, seminal and fecal fluids (and so on) on a daily basis, and our entire physical apparatus is perpetuated (although never twice in materially identical forms) through continual internal and external exchanges of fluids.

Of course, the very fact that the substances we're discussing are fluids, makes any sense of a 'core', or indeed a comprehensible corpus, practically impossible. We are not planning to substantiate or stabilise a concept that in its very definition must remain loose and fleeting. Classic academic rhetorics do not allow for unsubstantial logic – there is no rational gravity in an argument that always already abandons your grasp. The lack of a 'solid' line of thought does not necessarily imply a lack of material presence, however. Just as a body of water remains a 'body' despite its consistent flow, fluid thoughts may take on forms without firmament. This introduction will follow such a reflective stream of consciousness – a light and fluid logic, travelling from one strand of thought to another, moving in currents. Characterised as an 'alluvial' logic – our text is a trace, or embodiment, emerging through movement itself. It is the rhizomatic shape appearing in the wake of our thoughts.

As Michel Foucault continually reminds us, texts are embodied and being is determined by the textuality of materiality.¹ This being said, the written word will never truly 'capture' or recreate the essence of being. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari argue in their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* that "a book exists only through the outside and on the outside" – and this is its great strength as well as its failure (p.4). The necessary gap between being and textuality gives it a transformative ability. In view of such enabling separation, or abstraction, this text attempts to be an embodying (rather than an embodied) 'root' machine: the image of alluvium is an abstract apparatus that simultaneously aims to bring together and pull apart the "multiple, lateral, and circular system[s] of ramification" with which our physicality presents us. The suggestive title of our conceptual journey, 'being and slime', combines two aspects of Western corporeality that are deeply at odds with each other – classic Heideggerian ontology and the often 'messy' reality of the body – and our alluvial apparatus deconstructs this seemingly dichotomous relationship.

Part I: Fluidity

As the performance artist Bob Flanagan argues, contemporary ideas of embodiment are generally made 'presentable' in academic as well as in cultural discourse – they are thoroughly 'neatened' or 'dried' up. In his documentary *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*, Flanagan discusses the American educational model company Skillcraft's construction of a 'Visible Man', stated on the carton to be an "anatomically accurate scaled-down version of man". It is an attempt to create a veritable and realistic micro-man, with transparent skin and subcutaneous fat layers and complete intestinal and circulatory systems, available to any child or curious adult to perceive and peruse. The body's various layers can be built up, peeled off and interspersed, and the organs connected and disconnected at the user's whim.

Bob Flanagan is not content with this micro-model of humanity, primarily because of its comprehensibility and completeness – each part of the micro-body is solid, and there is no communication or movement within or without the system. Whereas the 'Visible Man' is an intact body, Flanagan contends that *his* body is not, and never will exhibit such stability. His performance art, interviews and documentaries focus on his life as a 'super-masochist' and life-time sufferer of cystic fibrosis. As such, his experience of embodiment is a continuous negotiation with fluidity – his is a punctured, porous and dramatically leaky body.

Flanagan thus decides to construct a new “autobiographical version” of the ‘Visible Man’ for his exhibition, ‘Visiting Hours’ (Santa Monica Museum of Art, 1992), creating the basis for a new, explicitly runny and mucous ontology (*Sick*). Flanagan’s medical condition forces him to constantly cough up green phlegm, which he arranges, using a small pump, to issue forth from the personalized doll’s mouth. Since cystic fibrosis also gives him chronic diarrhoea, exacerbated by his medication, a mixture of Alberto VO5 hair conditioner and tempeh pate continually dollops from the model’s miniature sphincter muscle. Finally, Flanagan’s sexual masochism gives him ample opportunity to enjoy his condition, so he furnishes his visible man with a continuous ejaculatory dribble, “straight from a bottle” of White Rain hair conditioner (*Sick*).

Flanagan’s leaky body stands out from the general idea of the intact body because of the extremity of his effusions, yet none of these bodily emissions are particular to his condition or sexual proclivities. As Margrit Shildrick shows in *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*, corporeality sustains itself through continual exchange of fluids, and any conception of corporeality that does not take this into account misses out on its most pivotal material function – sustenance of the life processes. Life, as Henri Bergson defines it (*Creative Evolution*, p. 5), possesses a motive and fundamentally fluid quality – and, in fact, science tells us that 90 per cent of the female body and 70 per cent of the male body consists of water (Martini and Nath, p. 568). The vitality of the living flesh is dependent on the body’s infusive and effusive mechanism – it only stabilises the moment it dies – and then another process of exchange begins as the body starts to decompose.

Flanagan’s body, like any living body, can thus be seen as an amalgamation of the more or less solid flesh and bone that compound him and the transportative fluids that simultaneously sustain and escape him. There is solid flesh and intermediary fluids. Yet, Flanagan’s visible man does not account for the more ambiguous substances of the body. Corporeal being is not merely a binary systematisation of stable matter and liquid dialysis. The human body contains many ambiguously soggy segments and liquidising layers that neither should be categorised as moisture or matter. As Deleuze and Guattari (in many ways taking their cues from Bergson) and numerous of their feminist and queer readers including Rosi Braidotti and Margrit Shildrick argue, corporeality is a composite and continually metamorphic construct, which so far has not been possible to capture or represent in Western philosophy.

The contemporary idea of 'being', in many ways harking back to Martin Heidegger's ontology and the seminal *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time), tends to operate as an entirely abstract and disembodied reflection of corporeality. There is *a type* of corporeality in Heidegger; however, the body in question is very solid, three-dimensional and intact. Although Heidegger argues that the sense of being is constructed in relation to a sense of being-in-the-world, this corporeal "in" is only significant as far as it enables the *Dasein*. The body is presented as the carrier of the senses and the locus of phenomenological experience – the place where being happens. Being exist only by the fact that "there is an *entity* which has made a disclosure of spatiality as the Being of the 'there'" (Heidegger, 2008, p. 171, emphasis added), but this entity is a mere vessel for the *Dasein*.

Indeed, for Heidegger, the Being question *necessitates* a departure from the body as such: "The existential analytic of *Dasein* comes *before* any psychology or anthropology, and certainly before any biology" (Heidegger, 1993, p.106). His often-discussed refusal to consider the body within *Being and Time* also neatly displaces the subject, performance and substance from his grander exploration of a holistic ontology. Thus a curious *absence* permeates his conception of *Dasein*. This is an absence of not merely bodies-in-the-world but, just as imperatively, of bodies complexly entangled-*with-the-world*: the hammerer (holding Heidegger's philosophical hammer) but also the thumb made unwieldy and strange to itself by the errant hammer stroke; the embodied being but also the constant leaky failure to actually em-body such a cohesive state of Being-in.

This failure is not unique to Heidegger. In an interview with Phillip Ottermann, celebrity-novelist Charlotte Roche argues that German culture has thus been stripped of all expressions for the inconveniently wet, soggy and messy reality that physicality presents to us. We are (culturally and ontologically) charged with evacuating the offensive fluidity from any relation to our experience of Being-in as its presence exists in relation of anxiety to our selves. Such a process of casting away this corporeal seepage, thus rendering it not an element of our existence, requires a kind of onto-corporeal evasion. We must "turn away" (to appropriate Heideggerian terminology) from the possible connectedness of this slimy excess of corporeality to not merely the body but also to Being in its relationality *to* its bodily vessel. Exposed to the threat of our own incompleteness, we plummet into *anxiety*, asserts Heidegger (1993, p. 71). By "turning away" from this loss, we literally suture being into an autonomous totality, *knowing*, for however fleeting a time, the completely

individualised structure of *Dasein* – at least, until we once more drown in the sensations of our being “there” in the world (1993, p. 99).

In *turning away* from this vision of pulpy corporeality, there is a certain cold comfort that lies in the reassurance of our selves laying claim to whole bodies and thus securing *our own* beings as individual, autonomous and whole. Buffeted by the possible lack of bodily sovereignty (that is, by a loss of mastery over one’s own body), yet aware of the completeness of material existence through this very possibility of incompleteness and unknowability, it is this liminality which Julia Kristeva identifies as “simultaneously beseeching and pulverising [its] subject” (1982, p.5). And within the depths of our discomfort lies the anxiety that something of an ineffable *existence* might also be able to seep out of itself, becoming unlimited and foreign.

In the leaky, fluidified and ever-disintegrating corpus, we believe we find a body impossibly but tantalisingly abject with itself, a Kristevan corporeality thoroughly at odds with Heidegger’s bodily absence and in complete conflict with his displacement of “biological”, component and corporeal parts within the holistic ontology of *Dasein*. However, one thinker can be bridged with the other, from *Dasein* to abjection, even at the basest level of the nomenclature which they utilise: of Heidegger’s motion of “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*), and of the “abject”, from the Latinate *ab-* (“before”) and *iacere* (“to throw”).

Heidegger posits that in turning away from the vision of the unnameable, unrecognisable secretions from the body which threatens to cast us into the void of incompleteness, we transcend our immanence to the world; we are “thrown” into being by glimpsing the form of and becoming subject to our being, and by thus recognising our being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 2003, pp. 174–5). For Kristeva, the decaying leakiness of the body is *denied* (as Roche suggests) through abjection:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay ... are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. (p. 3)

If – unlike the fluid and suppurating body, or the wet and leaky being of Roche’s central character, or even the living and simultaneously disintegrating corpus of queer theory – Heidegger’s being turns away from the sickening incompleteness of being’s body and its attendant bodily discharges, so too does Kristeva’s process of identifying the abject corporealise the other in order to cast it away from being.

Leaking out from that absence which riddles Heidegger’s bodiless and conceptual ‘being’, we find implicit fleshy relations that must refuse the possibility of their own disintegration in order to exist. Indeed, both Heidegger and Kristeva’s employed physicality corroborate to preserve the completeness of being. We throw ourselves upwards – turned away from the gorge before us which is filled with messy and amorphous, un-unitised fluidity – into primordial knowledge of existence and, indeed, a *transcendent* knowledge (Heidegger, 1993, p. 106; see also Cerbone, 2000, pp. 209–230). For the Latinate *ab* before the “throwing” of the *ab*-ject indicates both a direction for Heidegger’s thrownness: if we cannot throw the incomplete, the fluid (and under the terms of the abject, the sickly and deathly) below us by “turning away” and thus preserving our ontologically complete being, then we must cast ourselves *above* it. In other words, we head towards a form of transcendence (whether we obtain it or not) which function through *knowing*, *alienation* and *denial*.

In Kristeva’s renegotiation of Heidegger,

Dasein understands itself in relation to that which is foreign to it. ... For Heidegger, the examination of being throws Dasein outside of itself, towards structures that are both escaping and defining it. Such a transcendental institution of the other ... push[es] me towards an alterity that will force me to question, interrogate and think (Sjöholm, 2005, p. 112)

Both thinkers accordingly suggest that the transcendent form of wholeness operates only through a dialectic in which the proximity of the abject persistently threatens and confirms the resulting unity. For Kristeva, the precarity of such an encounter simultaneously compels examination and problematisation of ‘unity’, while also refusing the process of our own corporeal refluidification. It is a continual process of reconsolidation.

Roche's novel *Wetlands* attempts to break the vicious circle of abjection. This is not conducted in the Kristevan manner of continuous reiteration of difference, but rather "throws" (to persist with Heidegger's terminology) the body ruthlessly and inescapably *into* the mire of the *ab* (that is, into the "below") and by so doing explodes the very dialectic of this vertical mobility. Roche remarks to Ottermann that her book is an attempt to reclaim the 'moist' parts of the body and thus to reconstitute the true corporeal. Her heroine, the eighteen-year-old Helen Memel, revels in the 'juicy' and 'smegmatic' experiences that her body proffers her. Helen progressively perceives herself in relation to her slimy membranes and bodily emissions – she opens herself up to and embraces a moistened idea of her own Being-in. Refluidification, the body without the crossing of transcendence, refuses Heidegger's thrownness above and across the gorge of non-knowing and Kristeva's abject-normal binary.

The novel conducts a persistent and often disturbing refluidification of corporeality, however, there are a few passages that particularly demonstrate Helen's ability to actively relubricate her sense of being. Admitted to hospital because of an intimate shaving accident, which has caused her haemorrhoids to become seriously infected, the protagonist pleads with the doctor to let her keep her own surgical waste so that she can 'hold it in [her] hand and examine it' (p.8). When she finally receives it, fighting a powerful sense of abjection, she removes the slimy pieces of flesh from the zipper bag – and her immediate response is to eat it:

My fingers are covered with blood and goop. Wipe them on the bed? That would make a real mess. Not on my tree-top-angel outfit, either. Same mess. Hmm. Well. It is all stuff from my own body. Even if it is infected. I lick my fingers off one at a time. [...] Why should i be disgusted with my own blood and pus? (p. 77)

Such a reaction *might* be a powerful reversal of the abject into something transcendental. Helen experiences a sense of elation when she sucks the abject matter out of her body; it is obvious that eating her infected bits of flesh excites her. The argument she presents to herself is that there is no reason why she should find these substances abject, since they are *a part of herself*. Helen tells the doctor: 'I don't like the idea that a part of me could end up in the trash along with aborted fetuses without my being able to picture it' (p. 8).

The knowledge of the self is the reason why she also needs to touch, taste and smell her own vaginal 'smegma' before any form of sexual encounter. She reports that she never allows another person near her without an initial sampling of the product she has to offer:

I hike up my skirt and wriggle my hand into my underwear. I stick my middle finger deep into my pussy and leave it in the warmth for a moment before taking it back out. I open my mouth and stick my finger all the way in. I close my lips around my finger and pull it out slowly. I lick and suck as hard as I can in order to get as much of the taste of the slime on my tongue as possible. (p. 46)

This is a necessary preparatory measure for Helen, since 'There is no way I can spread my legs for some guy – to get thoroughly eaten out for instance – without knowing myself how everything looks, smells, and tastes down there' (p.46).

Roche tells Ottermann that German ontology has been effectively cleaned up and dried out. It has been erased from all phenomenological accounts of selfhood. *Wetland's* protagonist goes out of her way to create a multi-sensorial experience of her physical 'waste' and discharge. Her body comes to represent German corporeality and she is a corporeal explorer. As such, she needs to fully map the new territories she discovers in the uncharted wetlands of the German *Dasein*.

We tend to conceptualise bodies and bodily substances as solids: shit is packed into turds, ejaculatory fluids belong to the genitals that emit them and blood and pus are considered in terms of the residual scars and scabs that are formed through their release. Canonical queer theorists such as Tim Dean, Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam and even Elizabeth Grosz generally emphasise the fluidity of identity, or our *sense of being*, but the physical body persists as a solid entity. The flesh *itself* is seldom discussed – and even when it is, it is hardly ever examined in terms of its liquidising autonomy.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work is an exception. Several of her books, poems and articles, most notably her contemplations surrounding cancer and fat in *Tendencies*, *Dialogues of Love* and *Fat Art*, *Thin Art*, consider the ways in which her body affects *her*. Because of her long fight against

breast cancer, Sedgwick's flesh unequivocally determines Sedgwick's *Dasein* and the treacherous cells thus entirely come to reconstitutes her sense of self. Similarly, Sedgwick struggles to come to terms with her equally treacherous fat cells, although these also wrap her in a warm sense of comfort and security. In *Dialogues of Love* she writes that her breast cancer helped her experience her body *as a body*, but only once some parts were gone: 'I had the two breasts / I kept forgetting them. They / weren't there for me' (p.78) and in *Fat Art, Thin Art* she describes how she discovered the inherent virtue of fat when she missed the warmth of her husband's embrace. *Tendencies* states that her female body became real to her once part of it was removed. Like Helen Memel, Sedgwick explores the uncharted territories of her corporeal self and she finds a new fleshy fluidity that the conventional boundaries of embodied experience cannot account for.

Also like Helen, Sedgwick only recognises her body's fluidity when its normalised and expected functions fail her – and her experiences of corporeal being thus become negotiated in terms of abjection, otherisation, illness and disease. As Sedgwick attempts to re-internalise her transforming physical form, her horizons widen. She describes how the struggle against cancer curiously expands her identity and sense of self in time with the cancer cells' expansion of her tissues. The cancerous experiences *become* her self and her rhizomatic cell growths inflate the scope of her mind to develop a poetics of membranous multi-sensorial experience.

Sedgwick's becoming-cancer and becoming-fat is not dissimilar to Helen Memel's becoming-slime. Both Sedgwick and Roche attempt to formulate a new corporealised 'Dasein' or sense of self. Roche shows that the awareness and contemplation of bodily mucous and mucous substances is necessary for an awareness of a body, the workings of which are often taken for granted, and Sedgwick demonstrates how this awareness mounts in the moments when they fail. The truth that emerges is that physical fluidity cannot be separated from the scope of embodied experience, however much we abjectify it. Our membranous wetlands constantly remind us that the corporeal determines being and being *is* slime.

Part 2: Becoming-Fluid

What does this mean for our project of refluidifying corporeality? What can these texts *do* for our cultural conception of the body? Although Bob Flanagan, Helen Memel and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick give new life to the sliminess of embodiment, their experiences lead to fleeting moments of

discursive change or boundless, porous fluidity. Their texts ontologise, and the ontological always already remains bound to the individual, a spatio-temporally determined subject, a being *in* time. Any attempt to transcend these perimeters would doubtless prove hubristic, but as Aristotle's *Poetics* remind us, hubris (and eventual failure) is a necessary component of the truly cathartic textual exploit. In the spirit of this ancient wisdom, the corporeal bounds of our introduction will now dissolve and its alluvial, temporal, subjective and logical flows will decentre and disperse. Each of its fluids will run in its own separate direction, but in their scattered courses they will reconvene, commune and correspond.

Blood

[W]e are now ariued in these meadowes, where the vessels like so many brookes do water and refresh this pleasant Paradise or model of heauen and earth; I mean the body of man. And surely by these streames doe grow many pleasant flowers of learning to entertaine and delight our minds beside the maine profit arising there – from unto the perfection of that Art we have in hand. (Crooke, 1631, p. 825)

As the English physician Helkiah Crooke puts it in his *Mikrokosmographia* (1615), our blood vessels are like rivers, from which “doe flow into all the parts of the body Blood, Heate, Spirit, Life, Motion and Sense” (p. 825). All these concepts are curiously synonymous in Crooke's corporeal philosophy – and through them, the lifeless flesh blossoms with vitality and sensibility.

Crooke bases a large amount of his theories on ancient sources like Galen and Aristotle, although his views of the various physical processes also contradict some of their basic tenets. He develops Aristotelian notions of vitality and the ‘soul’ as a division between three different spirits into a theory of three types of blood: “Nature therefore because the Spirites are of three sorts, Naturall, Vitall, and Animall, hath prepared three kindes of Vesselles for their transportation, Veines, Arteries and Sinews” (Crooke, 1631, p. 824). Physiological ‘perfection’ is a balance of these three vessels, and their spiritual charge. The arteries carry the hotter, more unruly and impure spirits, and they catch the various nasty vapours and waste products of the body on their way through the various organs and muscles. The veins transport the purer vital spirit to its various parts – and the purest and hottest animal spirit is delivered to the brain through the nerves or sinews (p. 824).

Through its continual motion, the heart is the dispenser of all three spirits, although they are destined for different vessels. The left ventricle heats, spreads and nourishes the spirits – and in quick and nimble motions feeds the veins (Crooke, 1631, p. 128). However, as Crooke establishes, the heart also has the power to transform the blood and the spirits – the right ventricle cools and slows the arterial blood down, expunging “smoky and fumed vapours”, causing anger and malcontent, and ensuring the spirits are not clouded by unsavoury substances (p. 824). A balanced heart, with a balanced amount and quality of blood running through it, could take care of external as well as internally produced dangers.

Although Crooke wrote before William Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of the blood (in 1628), his conception of vitality and corporeality relies on continual circularity, fluctuation and porousness – a quality considered most clearly pronounced in women (Delaney, p. 46). This is why William Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth implores “the spirits” that “tend on mortal thoughts” to “unsex” her – she wants her heart made hard and impenetrable (1.5.39–40; p. 15). A hardened and unmoving heart would shrivel and clog up, obstructing the enspiriting and life-giving “brookes”. Lady Macbeth wants it to “make thick my blood, / Stop up th’access and passage to remorse” (1.5.42–3; p. 15), and this would indeed make her murderous intent unshakable. The “fumed” arterial blood would never be purged, strengthening her malice, and her womanly compunctions would remain unstirred, as the vital and affective spirits would not reach their required outlets. A hardened heart is a spiritual closure and a vaporous build-up, not merely in the blood, but in the whole body, “by the veynes, the whole body hath a kind of connexion or coherence” (Crooke, 1631, p. 827). An obstructed heart would lead to melancholy, spiritual and mental decline, and ultimately madness.

Arterial bloodletting could relieve us momentarily – and in *Macbeth*, there is a continuous bloodletting of the body politic. As the heroic MacDuff and Malcolm point out at the play’s violent conclusion, Scotland under Macbeth’s rule bleeds and bleeds – as its tyrannous head, Macbeth, and its heart, his wife, try to purge her of all threats to their rule (4.3.30–108, p. 64–6). But “they say, blood will / have blood” (3.4.124–5, p. 49), and as the play progresses, it becomes clear that the toxic element distempering the country is the unnatural deed that became its ruler’s inauguration, for as the doctor who tends the maddened Lady Macbeth declares, “Unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles” (5.1.70–1, p. 73). As Malcolm says, the only medicine for such a “deadly grief” is a “great revenge” (4.3.18–9, p. 70). If the initial murder of Duncan is presented as a stopping of the

"great spring", "head", "fountain" or "source" of Scotland's blood (2.3.98–9, p. 31), the final decapitation of Macbeth is the cathartic purge that closes and heals her many gashes and wounds.

Seed

Macbeth and the doctor speak of blood *having* blood and unnatural deeds *breeding* unnatural troubles. *Macbeth* features numerous parenting metaphors, and the protagonist is greatly perturbed by the witches' revelation that Banquo's seed one day will take his place as king. Macbeth has no offspring of his own, and thus has no direct successor to the throne. The idea of his "fruitless crown" and "barren sceptre" is devastating to him (3.1.60–1, p. 37). Once informed of his future as Scotland's king, he spills the nation's blood like his fellow men would spill their seed. His generational offering is fear and violence, and fed by Lady Macbeth's mother's milk, which she has requested be taken "for gall" (1.5.47, p. 16), they parent a country built on destruction.

Like most contemporary physicians, Helkiah Crooke, as well as William Harvey, believed that seed, blood and mother's milk were composed of the same elements. Mother's milk is highly nourished blood from the womb, transported to the breast and "pulled and drawn" by the mammary glands into milk. Also seed, which both men and women possess, is continually produced from blood. The testicles, or "spermatic glands" boil and heat the blood to the extreme, charging it with spirit – and this concoction is eventually led to the "parts of generation" through the spermatic vessels to be mixed and moulded during coitus. The excited vessels and spirited blood of each parent is thus the innermost core of the created child. Indeed, as Harvey indicates, it is the initial little red spark of life we see pulsating in the minuscule shape of the newly formed foetus (p. 60).

Yet seed, like blood, may be corrupted – and as another of Shakespeare's great tragic protagonists experiences, so can its fruit. King Lear's great scourge is the "unnatural" (2.4.274, p. 93) actions and cruelty of his daughters Goneril and Regan (and Cordelia, although she in actuality shows him sincerity). There is a "disease" (1.1.165, p. 14) and "degeneracy" (1.4.231, p. 48) in his seed that he cannot fathom – and he soon realises that the deformity of his daughters, stems from an infirmity in his own body: "twas this flesh begot those Pelican daughters" (3.4.69–70, p. 110). Lear's blood is clouded – and his flesh is distempered by Goneril and Regan's betrayal: "thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter, / Or rather a disease that's in my flesh, / Which I must needs call mine, Thou

art a boil, / A plague-sore, an embossèd carbuncle, / In my corrupted blood" (2.4.217-21, p. 90). And when his blood is boiled increasingly out of temper, his spirit and mind becomes increasingly infirm, for "nature, being oppressed, commands the mind / To suffer with the body" (2.4.102-3, p.84).

The "infirmity" (1.1.293, p. 22) of Lear's body responds to the "deformity" (4.2.36, p. 136) of his seed – and as such, the very course of nature becomes a curse. He rails at the whole concept of generation, asking the tempestuous spirits to "crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once" (3.2.8, p. 99). Lear requests a dissolution of the "offices of nature, bond of childhood" (2.4.174, p. 88) – a purgation of his corrupted seed and a liberation of his confined spirit. As it turns out, this can only be accomplished through the eradication of his diseased bloodline.

Milk

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. ... Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. (Melville, 1922, p. 393)

Seemingly boundless contingency lies in this phrase, dripping with the gelatinous gore of a sperm whale's congealing fleshy insides, Ishmael's sailor arms liquefying into a protean slime, his clutching fingers roping together a perverse, stewing compassion of fluids. Squeezed, he melts into his object other. Squeezing, he finds himself oozing at the seams, blending into gelatinous clods, becoming wet, creamy, localised, mixed.

Milk is the sweet soup of fertility and leisure – of Biblical bliss (*The Bible*, King James Version, Exodus 3.8) and mythological survival. When Romulus and Remus, abandoned at the river Tiber, suckle lupine teats under the shade of a wild fig-tree (Plutarch, Langhorne and Langhorne, 1831, p. 14), they build a city on this milk. Meanwhile, the land of Israel runs rich with milk and honey. Yet how surprising that these biblical rivers bear a sour, fermented tang (DuPuis, 2002, p. 29): the milk of the wolf taints generations of Romans with an insatiable hunger for 'blood and tyranny, ... eager

and hungry after riches' (Justin and Watson, 1853, [38.6]). From the nipple to the mouth and then into the blood, milk curdles; more, it itself *ingests* – it swallows whaleman Ishmael in its kindness and saturates the Latin twins in cruelty.

Milk, then, is a fluid of drowning and death (or in Crooke's case, the very opposite – excitation and life), yet still, regardless, the ambrosia of unlimited possibility. It is that monstrous white which Michel Serres identifies so aptly in *Genesis* as a blank, uniform field, a rising tide of *erasure* (p. 77–9). What Serres makes so startlingly evident – what realisation activates in Ishmael a sheer and immense "panic to the soul" (Melville, 1922, p. 179), despite his throes of spermy ecstasy – is that we do not necessarily pollute the clear expanse of milk with drops of foreign colour, but that, conversely, milk consumes the colour, bleaching it with a field of white. Perhaps, as Melville's whaler muses on the strange and forbidding shade, this indefinite unity of colourlessness, soiling as it cleanses and purifying what it dirties, thus "stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation" (Melville, 1922, p. 186).

Massaged and enfolded in many sailors' hands, Ishmael marvels as his borders begin to disintegrate: "my fingers felt like eels, and began, as it were, to serpentine and spiralise" (p. 392). As he squeezes unctuous lumps of whale jelly, he begins to squeeze himself, blend himself, milk himself into this mysterious, fleshy pool of fluid solidarity – becoming white. And what is white but "the visible absence of colour, and at the same time the concrete of all colours", a violently terrifying and seductive, senseless mixture of "dumb blankness, full of meaning"? (p. 186) It is in this blanched-white milk and sperm that Ishmael finds himself corrupted – indeed, himself *infecting* – with ineffable, unrelenting and universal kindness.

Pus

Left to warm and incubate, of course, milk separates. It spoils. Beyond the creamy, bottomless depths of oblivion – implicated, perhaps, in the fear of the mother, the dread of the teat, the terror of the breast – we find another obvious contaminate, that of *time*. Ravaged by bacteria, milk curdles, reeks and congeals like Melville's sweet spermaceti into strange, rancid, amorphous masses. We are talking now of the milk of corruption and disease. Time turns the liquids of the body into pus.

Roman medical encyclopaedist Aulus Cornelius Celsus writes in *De Medicina*, "*Ubi pus, ibi evacua*" – where there is pus, there evacuate it. The purulent body is not a healthy body, Celsus's adage infers. We must cast pus out of the body proper, turn away both materially from the abject and existentially from the abyssal possibility of irredeemably fluid Being (and this is of course what King Lear tries to do to Regan, the 'carbuncle' of his 'corrupted blood').

Before an awareness of bacterial infection and a theory of germs, discoloured and odorous pus was a fluid emanation of the miasmatic essence of disease. Consider for a moment what we now understand to constitute pus: born from infection, it is produced from the amalgam signs of bacterial contamination, of our own living matter and of our dead cells. This is an oxymoronical *living* decay: pus is literally and metaphorically the rotten disease *of* flesh (not *upon* flesh), whereby the very matter constituting our body gives itself to death (see Peyroux, 2000, p. 177). Pus, then, is a tauntingly ambiguous substance, unrelentingly borderline. The presence of this viscous mucous reminds us, terrifyingly and revoltingly, of how our sentient and presumably healthy bodies are constantly undermined by the powerless state of failure, rot and crisis.

This is the boundary that Kristeva writes of, "the border of my condition as a living being" from which the body as alive extricates itself (p. 3). This is where we *turn away* from such miasmatic confrontations, doing a Heideggerian pirouette which promises to secure our beings as individual, autonomous and whole. But the border, Kristeva indicates, is always terrifyingly uncertain – or rather, terrifying *because* it is uncertain, because it requires constant redefinition to keep it other to our selves. In anxiety, we recall that the ailing body forever haunts the substance of its clean and pure counterpart; just so, the smell of decay indistinguishably haunts the lush, nurturing possibilities of milk. With a mere drop of vinegar, we sour from Ishmael's white milk of kindness to the milky white of decay, and from clear unanimity to the repugnant abjection that it carries *in potentia*. Imminent and immanent, we turn away from this corporeal contamination again, now again, indefinitely.

Cancerous Andrea, with breasts putrefying from a cancerous affliction, emanates such a noxious odour from her suppurating sores that St Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), stalwart companion of diseased pariahs, nearly vomits (Raymond of Capua, 1860, p. 102; Morrison, 2003, p. 210–211). But in an ascetic gesture of absolute devotion of her body to God, she swallows down her disgust,

presses her lips down upon the pussy mammary and drinks rotten milk from the teat of her patient's wound.

St Catherine gags, almost throws up in the presence of this milky putrescence, not because of what it contains, but because of what it *is* – an ulcer of living decay. As punishment for her stomach's impious revulsion, the saint suckles the breast even as it seeps foul discharge (Raymond of Capua, 1860, p. 102); ingesting pus, she wishes herself redeemed for rejecting the malodorous spectre of death. Yet, paradoxically, by consuming the pustular, she nonetheless casts away this shadow of decay and triumphs over death (p. 102); indeed, she brings herself closer to something greater than life, something divine (p. 106).

This rejected corporeal sap opens lines of communication between the abject-other and God, leading into infinite *jouissance* (Kristeva, 1982, p. 126–7). It is a move of sheer transcendence which plunges Being into the purulent detritus of the body proper and, by sinking below the threshold of the whole into the anguish of confronting incompleteness, compels Being itself to *turn away* from the corruption and find an divine awareness of something higher than itself – transcendental Being.

Bataille writes in *Inner Experience*, “[i]n ascesis, value is not that of experience alone, independent of pleasure or of suffering; it is always a beatitude, a deliverance, which we strive to procure” (p. 22). Pus is thus once again rejected rather than accepted, rendered significant only as the otherised vehicle which may carry one towards the knowledge of God. Gone is Ishmael's milk of fluid congeniality: instead, taking *in* this infected juice immediately instrumentalises it, bringing St Catherine *beyond* it, transcendent rather than present, separated rather than mixed.

Leprous Andrea dies, repentant abject object, her sour milk on Catherine's pious, saintly tongue.

Saliva

In the mouth, fluids mingle; the hole of the outside-becoming-inside is rarely kept shut from the two-way passage of substances. In the mouth, pus and milk both turn to spit, where only the lingering hint of taste remains. As late as the sixteenth century, saliva was characterised as an excrement or filter of the blood, a by-product of straining or cleansing through the brain (Garrett, 1975, p. 553). Only three centuries later was the theory of saliva as the dirty dregs of bodily

filtration finally debunked entirely and biologists begin to recognise this fluid as a selective gatekeeper, incorporating some substances and rejecting others (Garrett, 1975 p. 555–6).

Yet spit still harbours the twin hats of castaway and custodian; it is undeniably vested with a pervasive and persistent ambivalence. The exchange of fluids through the passage of the mouth, of milk and pus into saliva, is both an unmaking and a claiming: it is a surrender and an invasion. Yet beyond, between and within this pitted and formal antagonism of effects – the self-expunging ecstasy of squeezing Ishmael and the rupturing discipline of St Catherine's objectivising suckle – there is also a kind of an ever-renegotiating *sharing*.

What silently traverses the lips, carried in the stream of texture and taste, is an intimacy that refuses form and signification; that, as Luce Irigaray suggests, fluctuates, blurs and overflows the subject (p. 112), that quietly defies the mechanics of solids. Inside the mouth, Jean-Luc Nancy explores this communality as "joying", "not appeasement, but a serenity without rest. To joy is not to be satisfied – it is to be filled, overflowed. It is to be cut across" (p. 106). He continues:

The joy of joying does not come back to anyone, neither to me or to you, for in each it opens the other. In the one and the other, and in the one by the other, joy offers being itself, it makes being felt, shared. ... to joy is an extremity of presence, *self* exposed, presence *of self* joying outside itself, in a presence that no present absorbs and that does not (re)present, but that offers itself endlessly (p. 107).

The salivary, we must admit here, analogises a continually shifting economy of fluids which delivers up what Nancy defines as "singular being" (p. 27–8). Being appears only ever with another – between blood and seed, mouth and milk, lips and pus – in the sharing of finitudes and singularities (Nancy, 1991, p. 28), or elsewhere defined as the friction between two infinitely neighbouring entities, "quasi contact between two unities hardly definable as such" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 111). Being, then, is forever multiply singular, dependent in fits and flows, "continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductible, diffusable, ..." (p. 111).

The flow of bodily fluids brings about *us*, momentarily dense and discernible at our liquid limits. To cede this dynamics of fluids to a rationality of corporeal solidity thus not only threatens the self but

performs its very execution. This text thus ceaselessly shifts and stirs its attention, gathered and accumulated from the material – from blood, seed, milk, pus and spit – to envelope the ontological. Yet again, this suggests nothing more than that both the material and the ontological are the alluvial mess of a contagious corporeality: of milk, pus, saliva, fat, piss, faeces, vomit, sweat, tears, sperm, cum, snot, mucus, and a host of so many other bodily fluids, that bring being into full, embodied focus.

Between us, 'hardness' isn't necessary. We know the contours of our bodies well enough to love fluidity. Our density can do without trenchancy or rigidity. We are not drawn to dead bodies.

(Irigaray, 1985, p. 215)

Notes

¹ See e.g. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1; 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' and Speech Begins after Death*.

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Feminism and New Materialism: The Matter of Fluidity

Elizabeth Stephens

It is perhaps appropriate that the concept of fluidity should hold such an ambiguous and indeterminate position in contemporary critical theory. Studies of particular bodily fluids – such as tears (Lutz, 2001; Elkins, 2001), menstrual blood (Bobel, 2010; Rosewarne, 2012), breast milk (Giles, 2003) and female ejaculate (Bell, 2010) – have been of central importance to critical theory, in general, and to queer and gender studies, in particular.¹ Despite this focus on particular bodily fluids, the concept of fluidity itself remains strangely uninterrogated. This is particularly strange if we consider how ubiquitous references to identities and sexualities as “fluid and contingent” are in critical theory, usually set in contrast to a presumptive popular assumption that these are unproblematically “fixed and stable.” In this oppositional relation, the “fixed” is invariably aligned with the conservative and normative, while the “fluid” is associated with the positive, progressive, and resistant. The binary of the “fixed” and the “fluid” plays a pivotal role in the conceptualisation of much of the work in queer and gender studies. And yet, despite this, what is meant by fluidity itself is rarely subject to examination.

The aim of this paper then is, in the first instance, to undertake such an interrogation. In order to re-examine the concept of fluidity – and to consider the inter-relationship between the conceptual, experiential, and material this concept invites us to consider – it will start by (re)turning to the foundational work on Luce Irigaray on this subject. Such a return is especially timely, given recently renewed debate about the relationship between the conceptual and material within contemporary critical theory as a whole, and within feminism in particular. Much of this work is associated with what has come to be referred to as “new materialism,” although it should be recognised that there is no real agreement about what this term refers to: Jane Bennett’s influential work on the “vibrancy” of matter, and Karen Barad’s important work on “agential realism,” are well-known and often-cited examples of the “material turn” in feminist theory, for instance, although neither identifies as a “new materialist.” In this respect, feminist new materialism is like fluidity itself: it remains a constitutively ambiguous category, less a coherent disciplinary field than a collection of often

contradictory or disparate works.² Much of this work, however, shares a common critique of earlier feminist writing on the material, framing itself as a corrective to a critical tendency to neglect the material in favour of “cultural” or “postmodern” concerns. As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost write in the introduction to their edited collection *New Materialisms*, for instance, the purpose of the volume is to address the “neglect of ... material phenomena and processes” in cultural and critical theory, a field that “privileges language, discourse, culture and values” over the material (2010, p.3). While Coole and Frost define their work and approach in opposition to that of postmodern or poststructuralist theory, however, closer examination reveals an interesting point of convergence. Just as fluidity is often taken as an unproblematically positive term feminist and queer theory, so is materiality championed in “feminist new materialist” writing as a “universal and indisputable good” (Bruining, p.151). It is precisely in this respect that Irigaray’s writing on fluidity has such an important and productive contribution to make to contemporary debates on these topics, problematising both the assumed distinction between the conceptual and material, on the one hand, and the widely-held assumption that any matter – such as bodily fluids – can be categorised as unequivocally positive, either in its cultural effects or experienced affects, on the other.

Theoretical Flows: Irigaray’s Fluidity

The work of Luce Irigaray provides what remains one of the most sustained and detailed accounts of fluidity, both as a philosophical concept and as an embodied materiality. Indeed, for Irigaray, the material and the conceptual are mutually constitutive terms. In “The Mechanics of Fluids,” she argues that the matter, and embodied experience, of fluidity provides a productive framework through which both to understand and to problematise the conditions in which femininity is excluded from the “ruling symbolics” and “proper order.” The philosophical issues at stake for Irigaray in her discussion of fluidity, and driving the importance of its theorisation to her work, are evident from the opening lines of “The Mechanics of Fluids,” which begins:

It is already getting around – at what rate? in what contexts? in spite of what resistances? – that women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of the ruling symbolics. Which doesn’t happen without causing some turbulence, we might even say some whirlwinds, that ought to be reconfined within solid walls of principle, to keep them from spreading to infinity. Otherwise they might even go so far as to disturb that third agency designated as the

real – a transgression and confusion of boundaries that it is important to restore to their proper order. (1993, p.106)

In this respect, while Irigaray's approach to fluidity may appear, at first glance, representative of the "cultural turn" by which the materiality of matter has come, according to feminist new materialism, to be overlooked, what is immediately apparent here is that, although framed as a philosophical problem, Irigaray's understanding of and interest in the fluid moves between consideration of its cultural function and its materiality – indeed, it is characteristic of its diffusion and capacity for disruption that fluidity causes a "confusion of boundaries" between these apparently binary possibilities. At the same time, however, it is important to recognise that in the questions with which Irigaray opens this essay, we also hear a cautionary note: according to whom is femininity so associated with a disruptive fluidity? To what extent is its transgressive potential always-already inscribed within the proper order as that which it constructs as its constitutive outside?

In this way, Irigaray's discussion of fluidity is framed not as an exploration of an aspect of feminine materiality or biology that is inherently positive and resistant to a dominant, phallogentric culture, and can thus be easily reclaimed as such, but rather as the very category by which the exclusion of the feminine is effected, the basis on which it is silenced as "the mute outside that sustains all systematicity" (1989, p.365). Feminine materiality and biology are not simply or unproblematically a source of difference or resistance; they are also the rationale for women's historical silencing and exclusion: "And there you have it," as she quotes Freud in "The Mechanics of Fluids," "that is why your daughters are dumb" (1993, p.112).³ Language here is both the mechanism by which women are excluded from the proper and exemplary of the systematicity with which women are incompatible – and in this respect, it is very like the association of femininity with fluidity. In framing her discussion of feminine fluidity as a philosophical and linguistic issue, then, Irigaray is not "privileging language" in a way that "encourages neglect of the material." On the contrary, it is precisely this opposition her work sets out to critique. As she questions pertinently at the start of "Mechanics of Fluids":

what division is being perpetuated here between a language that is always subject to the postulates of ideality and an empirics that has forfeited all symbolisation? And how can we fail to recognise that with respect to this caesura, to the schism

that underwrites the purity of logic, language remains necessarily meta-“something”? (1993, p.107).

Against this tendency to see the ideal and the material, the abstract and the sensible, as two distinct and mutually exclusive things, Irigaray is instead interested in the way fluidity – whose impropriety resides, precisely, in its inability to be confined in or by neat definitional categories – problematises such distinctions.

Thus what is immediately apparent in the way Irigaray frames her discussion of fluidity is that, firstly, the value Irigaray attributes to fluidity, and what she has to say about its relation to the feminine, is cautious and highly qualified. On the one hand, she is clearly and strongly invested in the idea that the association of femininity with fluidity has potential for productive and strategic appropriation, that it provides a means by which to disrupt, effectively, the ruling symbolics: it is that which “resists adequate symbolisation” and threatens to “jam the works of the theoretical machine” (1993, p.107). At the same time, as Irigaray immediately acknowledges, this understanding of both femininity and fluidity as inherently disruptive is itself a product of those same ruling symbolics, and thus consistent with – indeed an expression of – the constitutive exclusion of the feminine: the materiality of femininity is always already inscribed (or circumscribed) within phallogentric systems of language and thought, as their “projective map” or “geometrical prop” (1993, p.108).

For Irigaray, then, the association of fluidity with contingency and instability does not produce unvaryingly positive results but ones that are always highly contingent. Thus while Irigaray obviously recognises the importance for women in reclaiming and asserting the fluidity with which they have been traditionally associated, identifying this as a source of potential resistance, she is also very careful to note the dangers and pitfalls of this strategy, and the significance of negative cultural conditions in which such strategies are formulated. We see this in the way that she is concerned to show how limited – and limiting – the idea of fluidity, as conceptualised in and by a regime of “solids” can be. The fluid, she notes, poses certain dangers not only to the proper order but to those who would use it as a defiant source of difference: “it allows itself to be easily traversed by virtue of its conductivity ... it mixes with bodies of a like state, sometimes dilutes itself in them in an almost homogeneous manner” (1993, p.111).

For this reason, Irigaray's understanding of fluidity as a potential site of difference and resistance never assumes the biological to be a pure source of difference, experienced outside its wider cultural context; rather, as she shows, it is always interrelated to the cultural and conceptual. The contingency of the fluid has the potential to be both positive and negative. Thus while the cultural construction of femininity as incompatible with and disruptive of "the proper order" of things makes fluidity a productive site of appropriation and resistance, it is never a pure or unadulterated source of difference. Accordingly, Irigaray's approach to fluidity is a strategic one, as she explains in "The Power of Discourse." Here she speaks of "the necessity of 'reopening' the figures of philosophical discourse," and suggests that "one way [to do this] is to interrogate the conditions under which systematicity itself is possible ... how the break with material contingency is made, ... how the system is put together" (1993, p.74). This is a very close rearticulation of her opening statements in "The Mechanics of Fluids." Irigaray's approach could thus be most succinctly characterised as a strategic appropriation of traditional figures and representations of femininity designed to bring about their deconstruction, by exposing the limits and internal contradictions not simply in particular structures of language or philosophy but in their very systematicity. In this way, Irigaray's theorisation of fluidity continually moves between the material and the conceptual, seeing these as interconnected and mutually constitutive categories that need to be examined in relation to one another. Accordingly, her discussion of fluidity as a conceptual category is always directly related to the materiality of bodily fluids in a way that problematises attempts to speak of the material and conceptual as though they were opposing terms.

This problematic between "a language that is always subject to the postulates of ideality and an empirics that has forfeited all symbolisation" has been central to the reception of Irigaray's work in Anglophone feminism. While Irigaray's work – and especially her idea of "writing the body" – was enormously influential for a generation of feminists who were inspired and enabled by it, it was also and simultaneously the object of trenchant critique. Interestingly, the terms of this debate anticipate many of the issues at stake in today's debates between feminist new materialists and poststructuralist-inspired feminisms. For many feminist critics of the 1980s and 1990s, Irigaray's theorisation of fluidity was simply an expression of a "biological essentialism" that reproduced the most conventional and normative assumptions about femininity, naively celebrating the female body as a source of pure and unproblematic difference. As Claire Duchén protests, in Irigaray's work: "There is assumed to be a true, undistorted female sexuality waiting for the right time to

emerge, like a butterfly," (1986, p.101). It is significant to note that such criticism sprang from a broader contemporaneous critique of the cultural association of the feminine with the biological, driven by recognition of the extent to which women's biology has historically been cited as justification for their exclusion from, for example, educational, economic and legal spheres. As Elaine Showalter warned: "simply to invoke anatomy risks a return to the crude essentialism that has oppressed women in the past" (1981, p.185). For Teresa de Lauretis, similarly: "there is no going back to the innocence of 'biology'" (1987, p.20). Such caveats are worth bearing in mind in light of feminist new materialist claims that the matter has been overlooked in feminist theory, and that the calls to turn to matter "itself" thus represents a new direction in feminist thinking. Irigaray's work, on the other hand, sees biology quite differently: she repeatedly describes her approach as a movement through or a mobilisation of traditional figures of femininity. That debates about the status of the biological in Irigaray's work were so central to its initial reception is thus important – not because they represent a misreading of her work, but because they are indicative of the complex and contentious role the biological has played within the history of feminist theory.

If the role of the biological has been such a point of contention in readings of Irigaray's work, I want to suggest, it is because what is meant by the biological, and the implications of this for feminist philosophy and politics, has long been an issue of central concern and detailed discussion within feminism. We can see this further by turning to the reconsideration of Irigaray's work in the 1990s, which focused specifically on reevaluating the relationship between the material or biological, on the one hand, and the cultural or linguistic, on the other, in her work.⁴ Arguing against earlier criticism of Irigaray's work as biologically essentialist, Jane Gallop contends that Irigaray's work does not imagine a "'body itself,' unmediated by textuality," but rather attempts to "inscribe femininity where phallogentric language fails, in catachresis" (1988, p.93). Gallop argues that Irigaray explores the catachretic nature of femininity – or rather, the construction of femininity as the catachretic element within language – as a means by which to problematise what Irigaray has referred to as the necessary "division ... between a language that is always subject to the postulates of ideality and an empirics that has forfeited all symbolisation" (1993, p.107). Judith Butler advances a very similar reading in *Bodies that Matter*, in which she argues that:

the feminine appears for Irigaray only in *catachresis*, that is, in those figures that function improperly, as an improper transfer of sense, the use of a proper name to

describe that which does not properly belong to it, and that return to haunt and co-opt the very language from which the feminine is excluded. This ... is precisely the option open to the feminine when it has been constituted as an excluded impropriety. (1993, pp. 37–38)

Given the critiques of Irigaray's work as naively essentialist in the 1980, it is significant that Butler frames her own book, published in 1993, as a response to the counter-accusation that her work focuses too relentlessly on the cultural and linguistic, at the expense of the material and biological. In an introduction that anticipates subsequent critiques of such work in feminist new materialism, she notes that she is constantly questioned: "If everything is discourse, what happens to the body? If everything is text, what about violence and bodily injury? Does anything *matter* in or for poststructuralism?" (p.28).⁵

Butler's response is not to "return" to the body or materiality as a site of pure difference or radical alterity, outside the structuring systems of normative language and thought. On the contrary, she wants to interrogate what we understand matter and materiality to mean:

In an effort to displace the terms of this debate, I want to ask how and why "materiality" has become a sign of irreducibility. ... Is materiality a site or surface that is excluded from the process of construction, as that through which and on which construction works? Is this perhaps an enabling or constitutive exclusion, one without which construction cannot operate? ... What does it mean to have recourse to materiality, since it is clear from the start that matter has a history (indeed, more than one) and that the history of matter is in part determined by the negotiation of sexual difference. We may seek to return to matter as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference only to discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put. (1993, pp. 28–29)

As we will see in the second part of the paper, such comments remain highly relevant in light of the recently renewed criticisms of post-structuralist feminism made in the context of feminist new materialism. It is significant that, although Butler's deconstruction of the perceived binary between

matter and discourse/culture was articulated at length 25 years ago, this work (and the many others like it) is not engaged with by feminist new materialists such as Coole and Frost, who characterise such work as simply anti-materialist. As can be seen here, however, Butler's approach to materiality is driven by the same deconstructive dynamic that enables Irigaray's theorisation of fluidity and articulates a very similar critique of the assumed distinction between materiality and ideality. Thus Butler explains her aims in *Bodies That Matter* in the same unsettling interrogatory style as does Irigaray in "The Mechanics of Fluids," questioning:

If matter ceases to be matter once it becomes a concept, and if a concept of matter's exteriority to language is always something less than absolute, what is the status of this 'outside'? Is it produced by philosophical discourse in order to effect the appearance of its own exhaustive and coherent systematicity? What is cast out from philosophical propriety in order to sustain and secure the borders of philosophy? (1993, p.31)

Given this uncertain state of affairs, she argues presciently: "feminism ought to be interested, not in taking materiality as an irreducible, but in conducting a critical genealogy of its formation" (p.32). The shift of focus in Butler's work from materiality (as a stable referent) to materialisation (an ongoing process) is, in the first instance, consistent with the attempt to avoid what Irigaray calls "congealment" within the ruling symbolics – which would represent a consolidation of her theorisation of fluidity. In addition, it demonstrates how important the space of that putative distinction between ideality and empirics is not only to Irigaray but also to the subsequent feminists influenced by her work. In Butler's work, as in Irigaray's, bodies are understood both as having a material specificity and as a field of intersecting forces and spatio-temporal variables, as a series of dynamic processes and not a natural entity.

We see this not only in Butler's work, but also in subsequent feminist philosophy written in the 2000s. For instance, Rosi Braidotti, in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, provides a nearly identical account of Irigaray's work to that found in *Bodies That Matter* (written a decade earlier),⁶ and its significance for contemporary feminisms:

Following Irigaray, the most adequate strategy consists in *working through* the stock of cumulated images, concepts and representations of women, or female identity, such as they have been codified by the culture we are in. If “essence” means the historical sedimentation of many-layered discursive products, this stock of culturally coded definitions, requirements and expectations about women or female identity – this repertoire of regulatory fictions that are tattooed on our skins – then it would be false to deny that such an essence not only exists, but is also powerfully operational. (2002, p.41)

In contemporary critical theory, continues Braidotti: “The body remains a bundle of contradictions: it is a zoological entity, a genetic data-bank, while it also remains a bio-social entity, that is to say a slab of codified, personalised memories” (p.21). Feminist philosophers like Butler and Braidotti, explicitly positioning their work in relation to Irigaray’s, are concerned not to simply privilege the material, or to “return” to the body as though it had been forgotten or overlooked or as a source of radical alterity, but rather to explore the ways in which materiality and ideality are defined in an oppositional relation to one another, and the consequences – both positive and negative – of this for feminism. For the poststructuralist feminists influenced by Irigaray’s work, there is no matter but only materialisation, a continual process that makes, somewhat paradoxically, transformation a constant feature of embodied existence and subjectification. As Margrit Shildrick notes, “bodies, rather than being material and graspable from the start, are materialised through a set of discursive practices” (2002, p.10). Citing Butler’s claims that “there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body,” Shildrick argues: “The body, then, is not a prediscursive reality, but rather a locus of production, the site of contested meaning, and as such fluid and unstable, never given and fixed” (2002,p. 10).

New Materialisms, Old Debates

Given how central this discussion about the complex and mutually constitutive relationship between body and culture, materiality and language, has been to feminist thought, it is curious that the emergence of new materialism is so often framed as a return to a materiality that has been thoroughly overlooked and neglected in contemporary critical theory. This is a claim that has been gaining increasing critical traction, and can be found widely articulated in feminist work that, while it does not identify as new materialist, is clearly informing emergent work in this field. We see it

expressed in Stacey Alaimo and Susan Hekman's contention that: "The guiding rule of procedure for most contemporary feminisms requires that one distance oneself as much as possible from the tainted realm of materiality by taking refuge within culture, discourse, and language" (2008, p.1). It can be seen also in Elizabeth Grosz's exhortation that we need to "'return' to concepts of nature, matter, life" because "[w]e have forgotten the nature, the ontology, of the body" (2004, p.2). We see it too in Vivian Sobchack's call for a more phenomenological approach to film criticism:

despite the current academic fetishization of "the body," most theorists still don't know what to do with their unruly responsive flesh and sensorium. Our sensations and responses pose an intolerable question to prevalent linguistic and psychoanalytic understandings of the cinema as grounded in conventional codes and cognitive patterning ... [C]ontemporary film theory has had major difficulties in comprehending how it is possible for human bodies to be, in fact, really "touched" and "moved" by the movies. (2004,p. 59)

For Karen Barad, contemporary feminist studies of matter and materialism remain too often entrenched in a "representationalism" that reproduces an "ontological gap" between word and thing. In a critique that circles back to the concerns that motivate Irigaray's study of the relationship between ideality and empirics, Barad argues: "representationalism is the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing. That is, there are assumed to be two distinct and independent kinds of entities — representations and entities to be represented" (2003, p. 804). She concludes: "Representationalism separates the world into the ontologically disjoint domains of words and things, leaving itself with the dilemma of their linkage such that knowledge is possible" (203, p. 811). As Coole and Frost write in their introduction to the collection *New Materialisms*, the purpose of this field is, precisely, to address such critical oversight:

Our commitment to editing a book on the new materialisms at this time springs from our conviction that materialism is once more on the move after several decades in abeyance. Everywhere we look, it seems to us, we are witnessing

scattered by insistent demands for more materialist modes of analysis and for new ways of thinking about matter and processes of materialisation. (2010, p.2)

This argument that feminism in particular, and critical theory in general, has concentrated its attention on "language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind [and] soul ... as idealities fundamentally different from matter and valorised as superior to the base desires of biological material or the inertia of physical stuff" (2010, p.2) has been met with frank incredulity by feminists seeped in the history of feminist philosophy glossed in the first part of this article, and in which, as Irigaray's work demonstrates, such a distinction has been the object of deconstructive critique. As Sara Ahmed argues in "Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the 'New Materialism,'" debates about materialism have never ceased to play a central role in the direction of feminist theory. Materialism, Ahmed argues, is one of the key terms around which feminist theory has always oriented itself. The new materialist claim that feminism needs to "return" to a materiality that a previous "cultural turn" has encouraged us to overlook itself reproduces a "familiar or even habitual anxiety that feminism and poststructuralism have reduced 'everything' to language and culture, in what is often referred to as 'textualism,' and have forgotten the 'real' of the real world, or the materiality of what is given. As a reviewer of papers for journals," she writes, "I have lost count of the number of papers that have referred casually, usually without using examples, to how feminism or poststructuralism have not dealt with the body as a real, living, physical, biological entity or have reduced 'everything' to language, signification and culture" (2008, p.25). The claim that critical theory has neglected or forgotten the body, Ahmed argues, itself represents an astonishing act of forgetting, one that seems based on a wilful amnesia: "you can only argue for a return to biology by forgetting the feminist work on the biological, including the work of feminists trained in the biological sciences. In other words, you can only claim that feminism has forgotten the biological if you forget this feminist work" (p.27).

This argument is continued in Nikki Sullivan's "The Somatechnics of Perception and the Matter of the Non/human: A Critical Response to the New Materialism," published in 2012. Sullivan writes:

Like Sara Ahmed ... I am increasingly frustrated by the claim, repeated of late with a mantra-like monotony, that (usually nameless) feminists and/or social constructionists – even those whose work appears to focus on 'the body' – routinely

ignore the matter of corporeal life. ... [W]hat makes me uncomfortable is not a materialist conception of being-in-the-world, but rather, the distinction between "culture" and "matter" (as discernable elements) which ... is engendered by the new materialist perception of poststructuralist feminism(s) which constitutes what it purports to merely "observe". (pp.300–01) ⁷

Dennis Bruining's recent "A Somatechnics of Moralism: New Materialism or Material Foundationalism," further interrogates the assumed distinction between matter and culture in this work, arguing for the importance of seeing these as a mutually constitutive somatechnics. Matter and materiality, he writes:

are not awaiting their discovery in a "state", rather, they are the product of, constituted in and through, regulatory and discursive practices which spawn the processes in which they materialise; to think otherwise is to ignore the context in which such materialisation takes place. ... What Butler, Shildrick and Sullivan illustrate is that bodies, matter, things, and so on, are most certainly material, but that an investigation into their materiality always-already and with no exception involves a construction of that (knowledge of) materiality, and this construction reciprocally informs and is informed by the situated position of the investigating subject; in other words, matter in its own right, or, matter as such, does not exist. (2013, pp.161–162) ⁸

Moreover, in a context in which, as Nik Rose has recently argued, we are witnessing a widespread return to biologised understandings of the self, many of which can be seen to reproduce very nineteenth-century models of biological determinism (2006), calls for a return to the biological might be seen as consistent with, rather than resistant to, popular assumptions about materiality and biology.

Rather than attempting to resolve the debate between poststructuralist and new materialist feminisms, I would like to suggest – in the spirit of Irigaray's careful deconstruction of such apparently polarised positions – a new perspective on the source this contention. The increasingly entrenched opposition between these two positions might be productively reframed as evidence of

a sense of critical urgency to reconsider the role and nature of the material in a context of rapid cultural and epistemological change, one that is redefining how we both understand and experience materiality. As Beatriz Preciado has recently argued, the contemporary body “is not a passive living material but an techno-organic interface, a techno-living system segmented and territorialised by different political models (textual, computerised, biochemical)” (2008, p.108). In this way, the “new” in “new materialism” might be reinterpreted, not as a corrective (re)turn to a materiality that feminism has overlooked, but as an attempt to come to terms with new and emergent forms of materiality itself.⁹ Materiality, like culture and because of it, does not exist in an absolute unchanging state, outside history and thought. This is the point that Bennett and Barad have made so influentially. For Preciado – along with manner others, like Rose, working in the area of contemporary biopolitics – the matter of the contemporary body is being actively remade by new regimes of pharmaceuticals and biotechnologies. Catherine Waldby has described the increasing commercial and medical use of bio-matter as part of an emergent “tissue economy.” For Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr, the contemporary laboratory is a source of new kinds of living systems: artificially produced and technological dependent kinds of matter that are best understood as “semi-living” or “partially alive.” The emergence of feminist new materialism might hence be understood not as an attempt to redress the oversight of earlier feminisms, but as a response to such radical shifts in the nature of matter itself.

Conclusion

It is for this reason that Irigaray’s work remains so important. When Irigaray speaks of fluidity, as we have seen above, she is fully conscious of the dangers it poses as well as the possibilities it enables. While the logic of the “ruling symbolics” sees both language and philosophy as fully abstract and uncontaminated by the material, Irigaray argues that language and philosophy are always and inevitably informed by a materiality itself mediated by, and materialised through, the discursive practices by which it is constituted. As Irigaray argues at the start of “The Mechanics of Fluids,” the properties of fluidity mean that it is dilutable as well as diluting, passive as well as active, something that reflects and even exacerbates the conditions in which women are constituted as the mute outside of a phallogocentric culture as well as the means by which they may exert the pressure of their uncontainable indeterminacy and multiplicity on the systematicity of that culture.

For Irigaray, then, fluidity is not unproblematically or unequivocally aligned with the positive and progressive; rather, its dynamic nature, its conceptualisation as a field of forces, means that one must pay attention to the specific instances of each manifestation, instead of making generalising assumptions about its effects. Fluidity may enable a “transgression and confusion of boundaries” but it does so always as part of the (very conventional) construction of femininity, and of the materiality it represents, as essentially other to the logic and rationality of the “ruling symbolics.” Thus fluidity, while important and central, while a site of possible strategic appropriation, always remains a potentiality whose outcome, by its very nature, can never be determined in advance.

Notes

- ¹ As Elizabeth Grosz notes in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, seminal fluidity is the strange exception here; rarely subject to any discussion at all, she argues, male fluidity is instead displaced onto the female body (1994). For a detailed discussion of seminal fluidity, see my *Queer Writing: Homoeroticism in Jean Genet's Fiction* (2009).
- ² I use the term “feminist new materialism” here as most of the new materialist texts examined in this paper are by feminist writers, and to distinguish the work referred to here from the sort of “new materialism” described, for instance, in Jussi Parikka's *What is Media Archeology?*, which examines German media archeology under this rubric.
- ³ In “Così Fan Tutti”, she further cites Lacan's notorious claim that: “There is no woman who is not excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words, and it must be said that, if there is something they complain a lot about at the moment, that is what it is – except that they don't know what they are saying, that's the whole difference between them and me” (1993, p.87).
- ⁴ See, for instance, Diana Fuss's *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (1989), Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed's *The Essential Difference* (1994) and Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993).
- ⁵ A full decade later, Karen Barad would reiterate this criticism in nearly identical terms. In recent feminist work, she writes: “Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter” (2003, p. 801). In a critique of performativity that does not explicitly cite Butler, Barad continues: “properly construed, [performativity] is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the misconception that would equate performativity with a form of linguistic monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in

determining our ontologies than they deserve" (2003, p. 802).

- ⁶ It should be noted, however, that Braidotti critiques Butler's conception of materiality in *Bodies that Matter* as deeply flawed. She argues that the Hegelian roots of Butler's argument renders the Irigarayan body overly material, thus ignoring the realm of bodily experience so important to Irigaray (Braidotti: 2002, pp. 42-45). Butler has also criticized Braidotti's Deleuzean perspective on materiality in *Undoing Gender* (p. 200). For further discussion of the Butler-Braidotti debate on materiality see Mikko Tuhkanen's 'Performativity and Becoming' (2009) and Karin Sellberg's 'Transitions and Transformations' (2009).
- ⁷ As Sullivan notes, the idea of "somatechnics" was devised precisely as a way to try to rethink this putative binary opposition in a more productive way. She explains: "A few years ago, a number of colleagues and I coined the term somatechnics in order to highlight what we see as the inextricability of soma and techné, of bodily-being-in-the- world, and the *dispositifs* in and through which corporealities, identities and difference(s) are formed and transformed, come to matter, if you like. Somatechnics, then, supplants the logic of the 'and' (thereby moving beyond instrumentalist logic), suggesting that technés are not something that are added or applied to 'the body', nor are they simply tools the already-constituted body-subject manipulates to its own ends. Rather, technés – in the Heideggerian sense – are techniques and/or orientations (ways of seeing, know- ing, feeling, moving, being, acting and so on) which are learned within a particular tradition or ontological context (are, in other words, situated), and function (often tacitly) to craft (un)becoming-with in very specific ways. Perception, then, is both the vehicle and effect of a particular situated somatechnics, an orientation to the world in which the I/eye is always-already co-implicated, co-indebted, co-responsible" (2012, p.303).
- ⁸ Earlier concerns about precisely this issue are articulated in Jussi Parikka and Milla Tiainen's opening address to the "New Materialism and Digital Culture" conference, held at Anglian Ruskin University in 2010: "the new materialist conceptions of dynamic human and non-human materialities that acquire shapes, operate and differentiate also beyond human perception and discursive representational systems are, at least within feminist new materialisms, in danger of positing matter as an it-like fetish object precisely because of their insistence on its ontological distinctiveness. ... [D]espite intentions to the contrary many new materialist gestures actually solidify rather than 'fluidify' the boundaries between nature/culture and matter/signification".
- ⁹ A part of the problem here, I would contend, derives from the poverty of rhetoric in so much contemporary critical writing, in which the value of any particular kind of scholarship is always asserted in relation to what previous writers have "failed" to think of, or in contrast to work that "does not go far enough." Novelty in the face of previous critical neglect is not the only way to establish the value of scholarship, and is often simply not accurate or persuasive. A more generous critical relationship, in which previous work in a field is acknowledged and built on, would seem more consistent with the aims of feminism, and more conducive to productive dialogue between different fields and approaches.

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Excremental Eros: Pleasurable Decomposition and *The Lesbian Body*

Mary Catherine Foltz

Para una de las duras, mi amiga, Tatiana de la Tierra. En la estela de tu muerte, te anhele. Cada palabra, cada frase de este artículo es parte de una conversación que me gustaría tener contigo. Yo sé que no fuiste partidaria de la filosofía de Wittig; aun así, quisiera leer fragmentos de *Le Corps Lesbien* en tu cocina y discutir con pasión estas visiones de éxtasis. Tati, en verdad tu eres de la tierra y con amor continuo hablándote.¹

THE LESBIAN BODY THE JUICE THE SPITTLE THE SALIVA THE SNOT THE SWEAT THE TEARS THE WAX THE URINE THE FAECES THE EXCREMENT THE BLOOD THE LYMPH THE JELLY THE WATER THE CHYLE THE CHYME THE HUMOURS THE SECRETIONS THE PUS THE DISCHARGES THE SUPPURATIONS THE BILE THE JUICES THE ACIDS THE FLUIDS.

- Monique Wittig

Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* makes me wet. Her short prose poems – her erotic decompositions – inspire my own unravelling and I become liquid, exceeding corporeal wholeness and flowing toward her lesbian corpus, her lesbian corpse, her lesbian body. Given this opportunity to think through fluidity, I experience a delicious delight in the possibility of exploring what I jokingly have called with close friends the lesbian literature of leakage, linguistic and libidinal liquidity in lesbian letters, Sapphic scriptures of salivation and (other) secretion; or, more crudely, discourses of dripping desirous dykes. Especially within the contemporary political climate in the United States, I take great pleasure in the

opportunity provided by this issue of *InterAlia* to contemplate bodily fluids as they pull us toward the obscenity of the body in its refusal to maintain comportment, its mockery of margins and movement beyond cleansed narratives of the self. While the religious right rallies against all kinds of women's pleasures that exceed a reproductive mandate, the liberal left celebrates the romantic longing for contractual monogamous bonds for queer folk sanctioned by legal, familial and religious institutions. Both discourses, albeit in different ways, converge around the cleansing of non-normative desire and deviant sexuality; one takes up a missionary position against all variance from God's "natural" law and calls queers to abandon all hope of salvation should we continue to worship at the temple of the body, while the other promises to sanctify our monogamous love in holy matrimony, a mating of souls that purifies the lesbian body by making her a wife.²

Returning to a key text of the 1970s with ecstatic nostalgia, it is invigorating to float in the effluent tide of materialist feminist desire and to ooze in experimental prose that speaks of the transformative power of queer sexuality and community. Indeed, I open with a confession about my own pooling bodily subject as a way to highlight the inspiring power of Wittig's poetics – as an expansion of her theoretical work – to present bodies and pleasures in vivid and vulgar vulviform verse,³ to focus on excessive bodily pleasures as a starting point for a reimagination of "eros as power" to transform subjectivity and community.⁴ The cunning linguistics in this text tongue and erode the limited possibilities for bodily pleasures dictated by "the straight mind" (see Wittig, 1992), reminding readers of lesbians' sexual movement that circle around the decomposition of women's bodies, the "unnatural" pleasures that lesbians enjoy, which result in the ecstatic expulsion of effluvia. Lapping at the juices of the body, Wittig's lesbians taste the possibility for pleasurable excretion to remind readers that we can come out of rigid definitions of gendered bodies, that we can come beyond limited reproductive nuclear family structures, that we can come to revel in the excremental self as proof of pleasures of other ways of being.

In the following analysis, I move through two aspects of *The Lesbian Body*: representations of excremental eros that awaken lesbians to other possible bodily schemata; and representations of ecstatic decomposition into the world. This first section of the essay shows why effluvia are so important for Wittig's play with queer sexuality, why Wittig defines the lesbian body by its

rejectamenta as we see in the epigraph: “juice, spittle, excrement, fluid” (1976, 26). Indeed, all bodies are excremental and thus we might wonder how the lesbian body is any different from others. In my analysis, I show that lesbian is not so much an identity in this text, but a way of moving in relationship to other bodies gendered as women, a way of stimulating female flesh that exceeds “compulsory heterosexuality” (see Rich, 1980). Thus, the appeal of a focus on *The Lesbian Body* for this special issue of *InterAlia* lies in the way that Wittig counters the “natural” and “biological” definitions of woman with the effluvia of lesbian bodies. As she famously states, lesbians are not women because they do not identify themselves by “natural” reproductive capabilities, their “natural” status as lack, or their “natural” passivity in sexual encounter (Wittig, 1981).⁵ Textual and actual lesbian sex acts rupture – or “destroy” – the subordination of fluid sexuality to reproductive biological imperatives or heterosexual positioning because they circle around all of the pleasures that bodies enjoy when they are not becoming women, not being penetrated by a phallus. While discourses of heterosexuality cork and cement women’s identity into penetrative productivity of offspring or gender (women are the holes from which babies emerge; women are the holes which penises fill),⁶ lesbian encounters liquidate these formative fictions of femininity.

For Wittig, lesbians *are* the lovers that linger upon libidinal leakage, delight in unproductive ecstasy and the fluidity of the body, the material proof of the body’s flow beyond the aforementioned definitions of women. Putting pressure on different possibilities for bodies and pleasures,⁷ these fictional lesbians locate eros not in the assumption of identity but in the decomposition of self, using the excremental drainage of the body as a sign that women’s flesh exceeds prescriptive cultural definition. Women, therefore, become lesbians when they enact sexuality attuned to the way in which the body drips past gendered demarcation and construction, in which the body flows beyond borders, denying through various pleasures the cultural constructions of “normal” sexuality. Her bodily subjects are lesbian because of how they delight in the excessive mess of the body, how they acknowledge and consume excreta and thereby discharge rigid gendered movement by revelling in the bodily fluidity that surpasses the “natural” mandates for women’s pleasure and bodily performance. If discourses of heterosexuality stop up women’s pleasure and plug the porous body, ignoring or cleaning away the fluid attestation of pleasure beyond sexualised gender roles, lesbianism in Wittig’s account is the practice of unfolding, eroding and transforming the full body. Through Wittig’s depictions of

excremental eros, readers are called to move past definitions of lesbians as women who love women and toward other ways of thinking of queer sexuality – namely, the movements of subjects who champion excreta as signs of the impossibility of stable identity formations. Each time the word lesbian is used in this essay, I point not to identity, but instead to subjects who delight in the pleasurable erosion of self and others.

With the conclusion of the essay, I turn to a focus on the lesbian corpse, the import of the self as soil in Wittig's erotic display of worldly unravelling in "tiny deaths". Thus, I extend the argument of the first section by showing how Wittig deploys the fluidity of the lesbian corpse not only to counter rigid discourses of heteronormativity, but also to challenge the imagined separation of human subjects from the ecosystems of which they are a part. While dykes are the drainage ditches that roar salty songs of the dissolution of self, of pleasurable rupture and porousness, they also see decay as the matter from which to fertilise (not birth) different ways of relating to the world. Thus, excremental eros in the text is not only about the transformation of women's bodies, but also about a celebration of intimate connection to the world around us, a celebration of the self as soil as way to connect with other matter, a way to give our fertilising bodies as gift to other life. In decomposition for Wittig, we lose our isolated subjectivity and spread out to touch and be touched in worldly enrapture. Thus, we might say through her text that while lesbians are not women, they also are not human in that they refuse to separate the subject from other matter. It is the pleasures of decomposition in sexual encounter that lead lesbians to a revision of the genesis of human subjectivity and a movement toward a desire for an earth lover – not mother.

By analysing passages from *The Lesbian Body* that rewrite and revise the creation stories found in Genesis, in the conclusion of the article I show Wittig's materialist feminist joke in which she trumps the "natural" order of heterosexual positioning with the natural erosion of flesh. In other words, Wittig makes the lesbian body a corpse to highlight how lesbian sexual practice revolves around a celebration of multiple forms of pleasurable bodily decay. Thus, Wittig challenges origin stories that refuse to allow women to leak past sexualised gender roles forwarded as natural expressions of human sexuality. Through excretion in sexual encounter, Wittig's lesbians come to understand death not as the terrible end to the subject – a return to cursed dust – but instead as another transformation into

decay, which allows for intimate union with soil in the excremental fertilisation of other life. Moreover, revisions of Genesis overturn the logic of humanity warring against the mortal flesh; *The Lesbian Body* suggests that a delight in sinking into the world marks a unique kind of intimacy – an excremental eros – that might just help us focus on the joy of being organic matter, rather than the horrors of decay and death.

In what follows, I tear apart *The Lesbian Body* and reconfigure it, moving through lesbian touch, lesbian tonguing and tasting, and lesbian eating and engulfment. Each of these various sexual actions of Wittig's fictional lesbians revolve around making the beloved excrete, bringing the body out of itself and riding tides of effluent to confirmation of the joys of unravelling. Because we are discussing lesbian sex acts, it seems appropriate to begin with some clitoral stimulation, some unproductive touching of female genitalia, which in Wittig's account is not mere foreplay, but incitement to effluvial revision of subjectivity. Still, as readers quickly learn, these lesbians are not fixated on genitalia as the only site of erotic pleasure, but explore the pleasurable possibilities of the full body. Wittig writes (1976, p.35),

M/y clitoris m/y labia are touched by your hands. Through m/y vagina and m/y uterus you insert yourself breaking the membrane up to m/y intestines. Round your neck you place m/y duodenum pale-pink well-veined blue. You unwind m/y yellow small intestine. So doing you speak of the odour of m/y damp organs, you speak of their consistence, you speak of their movements, you speak of their temperature. At this point you attempt to wrench out my kidneys. They resist you. You touch my green gallbladder. / have a deathly chill, / moan, / fall into an abyss, m/y head is awhirl, m/y heart is in m/y mouth, it feels as if m/y blood is all congealed in my arteries. . . . / see my/self stretched out, all my entrails unwound. / open my mouth to sing a cantata to the goddess m/y mother. M/y heart fails in this effort. / open m/y mouth, / admit your lips, your tongue, your palate, / prepare to die by your side adored monster while you cry incessantly about m/y ears.

Other critics have focused on Wittig's usage of the split subject in passages like this one, highlighting her refusal of the unitary subject "I" as well as the possessive adjective "my". In the David Le Vay translation from the French, the "I" is italicised in order refer to "j/e," the "I" that is not unitary, but rent. As Karin Cope (1991) and Namascar Shaktini (2005) argue, Wittig plays with Emile Benveniste's insight into the "I" as a fiction produced through language to distinguish a (masculine) whole and stable self from others; when the word "I" is appropriated, the empty sign is filled by a subject who distinguishes himself from "you" (see also Shaktini, 1982). Still, Benveniste shows that because any speaker can appropriate the "I" for himself that the multiplicity and multivocality of the "I" is revealed. As the "I" can be reappropriated, "the sovereignty of anyone's use of language cannot be guaranteed" (Cope, 1991, p. 84). Following and queering Benveniste's work, what Wittig

exposes in her lesbianized or slashed I is not merely a split subject, one of a doubled or duplicitous nature, or the mark of a certain sexuality. She also lays bare the privitiveness of appropriation, the ways in which "I" can only ever be an insufficient shelter, a lean-to, which subjectivity borrows to call its (which is usually to say 'his') mansion (Cope, 1991, p. 85).

So, too, the possessive adjective "my" cannot hold in Wittig's text as through sexual encounter the subject does not experience the body as "her" own, but as open to a "you" who brings "her" outside of the self and into the ecstatic flow beyond the limits of constructions of the gendered body.⁸

Keeping these critics' important arguments in mind, I want to focus here on the slash as "a mark of a certain sexuality", or a sign of a certain kind of sexual practice of which excreta is the focus. Placing "j/e" in the context of a passage like this one, we might read Wittig's backslash as a way to point to a feminine "I" that leaks past gender when pressured by a lesbian body, when a lesbian "you" teases the subject past subjection to gendered norms. Splitting the labial folds, fingering the clitoris, the lesbian "you" rewrites the body of Woman beyond reproduction, beyond the uterus. The "you" breaks past the membrane wall at which discourses of heterosexuality end and toward the excretory system; pulling the duodenum out from the "I", the lesbian "you" wraps the tubing around her neck, the excremental necklace becoming sign of the desire to unwind previous mappings of women's bodies. Speaking of

the “odour of damp organs”, the lesbian “you” “cries incessantly” about movements beyond limited understandings of self, bodily movement toward and transformation to excess. Beneath the hands of the lover, the “I” comes to experience the body unwound, the bowels loosened, the kidneys unleashed to gush out the excremental self. The celebratory speech of the lover calls the “I” to acknowledge the pleasure of erosion as a starting point for the creation of other songs of self where excess is not denied, but ecstatic proof of other ways of being. Death of the subject, at the conclusion of the passage, is not final, but a beginning for the “adored monster” and the beloved as they seek to live in the decomposition of the category of Woman, to thrive in the pungent wake of the body undone. Wittig makes a gash – in the “I” and in the body – to open up the subject to the excremental flow produced by lesbian touch, a touch that “shouldn’t” produce pleasure in Woman “intelligently designed” for phallic penetration alone. The insistent lesbian touch, here and in other passages, pulls apart the rhetoric and the grammar of sexualised gender roles,⁹ showing through excremental bodily responses the possibilities for bodies and pleasures beyond those constructed in discourses of normative heterosexuality.

As the lesbian “you” touches the “I” beyond recognition in the text, the “you” also devours the fluid rejectamenta of the body, taking in excreta to fertilise different forms of relationality between beings. Rather than erecting gender through penetration – a masculine “I” who plows a feminine “you” – the lesbians penetrate each other to unleash the fluidity of the “I” and the “you” in order to come together in excremental production and consumption. Taking the excess of another into the body, the lesbians nourish a relational mode that allows for subjects to fold into each other in excremental eros that brings them outside of self and inside the body of the other, collapsing standard understandings of sexual positioning where an impenetrable masculine “top” invades a feminine “bottom”. For example, Wittig writes of an encounter between lover and beloved:

You turn m/e inside out, / am a glove in your hands, gently firmly inexorably holding
m/y throat in your palm, / struggle, / am frantic, / enjoy fear, you count the veins and the
arteries, you retract them to one side, you reach the vital organs, you breathe into m/y
lungs through m/y mouth, / stifle, you hold the long tubes of the viscera, you unfold
them, you uncoil them, you slide them round your neck, slopping you let them go, you

cry out, you say delightful stink, you rave, you seek the green fluid of the bile, you plunge your fingers into the stomach, you cry out, you take the heart in your mouth, you lick it a long time, your tongue playing with the coronary arteries, you take it in your hands... you, your sovereign hair over m/y face, bent over you look, you, your eyes not quitting m/y eyes, covered with liquids acids chewed digested nourishment, you full of juices corroded in an odour of dung and urine crawl up to m/y carotid in order to sever it. Glory. (1976, p. 85)

This passage begins with a penetrative hand, turning the "I" inside out; penetration here leads to the expulsion of the fluid self rather than the implantation or creation of Woman. Indeed, the penetrator here does not leave ejaculate in or on a female body as the climatic end to sexual encounter, but instead invites the passive "I" to rupture, to release the body's juices onto the prying hands, into the waiting mouth, of the "you." As in the previous excerpt, the "I" experiences the full body undone as the vital organs are touched and impacted by the hands of the lover working toward the release of excreta. In other words, she is not reduced to a vaginal canal for the pleasure of an other, but feels the stomach become sexual organ in responsive contraction to the movement of the "you" as well as the heart pounding with each tongue stroke of the lover. The full body is alive with secretion in the "frantic" struggle before "glorious" orgasmic expulsion represented in the metaphor of exsanguination when the "I" is completely undone. Still, the focus here is on the lover who laps up the various juices produced by the beloved until that "you" is covered with and full of the vaginal secretion, blood, bile, urine and dung of the "I". It is the delight of the "you" in the "stinking" effluent of the body that confirms the excessive difference of lesbian sexual play. The "you" penetrates the "I" to bring the body beyond the limits of heterosexual comportment, to witness the pleasures of "unnatural" sex acts and to feed off the bodily excesses produced by such pleasures. Taking the excess of the body that is no longer woman in through the mouth, the "you" raves about the goodness of fertile excreta as s/he too becomes corroded, infiltrated by liquid remains of bodily ravishment. Intently watching the "I" come out of the self, the "you" also is transformed into an excremental body, a receptacle for the waste of another. The "you" does not gain gendered identity – the status of masculine penetrator – but instead is overtaken by the fluid tide of another, stained as a lesbian that delights in the unproductive ecstasy of others. Lesbian eros is born in touch and penetration that releases the "I" into excremental form so

that the body can flow outside itself and into another, rupturing and remaking the “you” who absorbs and therefore becomes excess.

Turning to Wittig’s theoretical work, we can see with greater clarity the motivation for fictional depictions of violent transformative lesbian sex: Wittig seeks to challenge the idea of a “natural woman” not by “dragging” out exaggerated performances of idealised gender, but instead by turning toward the bodily movements of lesbians whose sexual performance revels in the excess of the category of “Woman.” In other words, Wittig is not interested in all the ways that we can show how women are made, but rather in how lesbian sex acts demolish and push past culturally constructed limitations for women’s pleasure. She writes in “One is Not Born a Woman”,

A materialist feminist approach to women’s oppression destroys the idea that women are a ‘natural group’... a group perceived as natural. ... What the analysis accomplishes on the level of ideas, practice makes actual at the level of facts: by its very existence, lesbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a ‘natural group.’ A lesbian society pragmatically reveals that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and shows that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a ‘natural group.’ In the case of women, ideology goes far since our bodies as well as our minds are the product of this manipulation. We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us. (1981, p. 103)

Through depictions of sexual encounter in *The Lesbian Body* likes those presented above, Wittig fleshes out this theoretical argument. As a “natural group”, women are defined by their difference from masculine bodies: their lack of penetrative power, their vaginal holes that signal this lack. The “myth” of woman returns again and again to bodily difference in order to assert the “naturalness” of divisive gender; the vaginal canal is “proof” that women are designed for penetration and the phallus “proof” that men are made to fill this hole (Wittig, 1981, p.103). Bodies and minds in Wittig’s account are manipulated to work according to this myth as the full possibility for erotic pleasure is reduced in both “men” and “women” to their genital difference. Because lesbians deny this reduction, refuse this

limitation, they reveal in sexual practice the ways that the body exceeds culturally constructed and sanctioned performance of sexualised gender roles. As I have shown in the previous analysis, Wittig's lesbians come together to celebrate the body's multiple forms of excretion – from mouth, vagina, excretory system – and therefore, disrupt the established governing myth by unravelling the body "feature by feature". Thus, the violence of lesbian sexual encounter that has turned some critics off shows how lesbian sex acts dismantle the limited possibilities for gendered bodies. As they seek pleasures beyond the "natural" positioning of men and women, they come to see heterosexual composition as a "distortion" of potential bodily pleasure; by awakening the body to its multiple delights in the expulsion of self beyond gendered comportment, lesbians exult in the ruptured feminine "I" who leaks past myth of woman, who oozes out to fill "you" with excess.¹⁰

By posing this argument, I critique a strain of criticism that claims that Wittig essentialises the heterosexual and homosexual divide and further disavows the various identities that lesbians claim, such as butch and femme, which destabilise gender. Judith Butler's work on Wittig exemplifies this type of criticism and thus is worth quoting at length. She writes:

Clearly, the norm of compulsory heterosexuality does operate with the force and violence that Wittig describes, but my own position is that this is not the only way that it operates. For Wittig, the strategies for political resistance to normative heterosexuality are fairly direct. Only the array of embodied persons who are not engaged in a heterosexual relationship within the confines of the family which takes reproduction to be the end or telos of sexuality are, in effect, actively contesting the categories of sex, or at least, not in compliance with the normative presuppositions and purposes of that set of categories. To be lesbian or gay is, for Wittig, no longer to know one's sex, to be engaged in a confusion and proliferation of categories that make sex an impossible category of identity. As emancipatory as this sounds, Wittig's proposal overrides those discourses within gay and lesbian culture that proliferate specifically gay sexual identities by appropriating and redeploying the categories of sex. The terms *queens*, *butches*, *femmes*, *girls*, even parodic reappropriation of *dyke*, *queer* and *fag* redeploy

and destabilize the categories of sex and the originally derogatory categories for homosexual identity. (1999, p. 156)

Here, Butler counters Wittig's excremental bodies with non-normative identity, the creative power of lesbian and gay people to "redeploy" categories of sex and to "proliferate" sexual identities. Indeed, she is right to point to all the ways that GLBT community members have engaged and continue to engage in disruptive identity building. A femme top, an identity that I claim on occasion, does disrupt normative understandings of gender for she wields a femininity that promises penetrative power and deploys signs of femininity to signal a sexual subject who may choose to bend a willing other to her desire. Butler also is right to claim that Wittig "overrides those discourses" that with pride reappropriate or redeploy sexual identity.

Still, in Wittig's theoretical work and poetics, readers encounter the pleasures of avoiding a redeployment of sexual identity, the ways in which a focus on bodies and pleasures – rather than the celebration of identity – avoids the limitations that we might impose on ourselves and each other. By showing the ways that "women's" full sexual pleasure has been distorted through discourses of normative sexuality, Wittig warns against non-normative celebrations of sexual identity that might repeat, albeit in new ways, restrictions for pleasurable contact. Indeed, Wittig is interested in the possibility of sexual encounter to disrupt both normative and non-normative sexual identity, to topple the ways in which subjects understand self before sharing excreta with others. Perhaps more so in her poetics than in the theory, Wittig loosens the link between sex acts and identity formation by highlighting the ways in which bodies ooze past whatever limitations our discourses of subjectivity impose. Wittig offers a challenge to queer community members to live in the excess of identity, to celebrate the fluidity of multiple bodily pleasures that refuse the rigidity of discourses of any sexual subjectivity. In *The Lesbian Body*, it is difficult to define what or who lesbians are: they are not butch or femme, nor are they man or woman, but instead bodies sharing in their goodness of excremental selves, the pleasures of becoming wasted subjects through encounters with lovers. Thus, Wittig's lesbians don't come together to create, to proliferate and to enforce categories by which we might identify self and each other, but to celebrate the body's excessive leakage past categorisation in sexual encounters.

Critiques of Wittig's work such as Butler's are caught up on the usage of the word lesbian, assuming that this term refers to women who love women. In close analysis of the text of *The Lesbian Body*, readers encounter something radically different from this definition: "you" and "I" rolling in the excess of the body, seeking the excreta of each other. Thus, arguments like Butler's and Jacob Hale's are correct to forward the claim that "Wittig's analysis of the categories of sex obscures the specificities of the ways in which human beings are gendered through sexuality and the ways in which human beings gender themselves through sexuality" (Hale, 1996, p.101). Indeed, citing Halberstam, Hale forwards a variety of sexual identities that would be *obscured* in a text like *The Lesbian Body* – "guys with pussies, gender queens, F2Ms, lesbians who like men, daddy boys, ... women who fuck boys, women who fuck like boys, dyke mommies, transsexual lesbians, male lesbians" – and argues that problem for Wittig is that her

analysis is too simplistic to handle the variety of ways in which people, including lesbians, are gendered. Since Wittig's view is that the concepts man, woman, and lesbian each rest on a single defining characteristic, her view does not have conceptual room for the multiplicity of genderings present even only among contemporary U.S. lesbians (Hale, 1996, p. 101).

Although I am persuaded by these theorists' important celebration of various sexual identities and queer positionings, I argue that we don't have to throw out Wittig's excremental bodies because they avoid presentation of these various gendered identities. Instead, we might see a text like *The Lesbian Body* operating in a different mode in which subjects come together not to affirm identity, but to lose it. Presenting the slashed "I" as a wasted subject engaged in sexual encounters, Wittig gives us room to explore sexual encounters that makes a mess of ourselves, pushing us past even the non-normative identities that we form. Part of the power of sexual subculture is this ability to experience ecstasy without giving it a name, without solidifying identity. Indeed, sex-positive community spaces frequently allow for a play with excess even as they also proliferate sexual identities; while some participants may choose to form and to repeat rather stable sexual positioning, others may move around, shifting from top to bottom to voyeur or toward an engagement with participants who claim multiple sexual identities. Wittig's focus on the fluidity of "you" and "I" – the excreta of lovers – need

not refer to women who love women, but instead to subjects who seek rupture, who see in the excess of the body the possibility to embrace pleasure in many different forms. Thus, "you" or "I" can be appropriated by any reader despite the sexual identity that they might claim for Wittig is more interested in queer subjects who excrete past identities that they have formed. Let me put this another way: when we excrete together, the excess of our bodies challenges whoever "you" or "I" are before we encounter each other for this leakage makes "me" and "you" nothing but waste. As I mentioned above, every body is excremental, but Wittig's queer "you" and "I" are the subjects who revel in this physical wreckage of self without erecting identity from the ways in which we excrete together. To read "lesbian" as seeker of the excremental self is not to affirm a heterosexual/homosexual binary, but instead to move past this binary as well as past a proliferation of sexual identities in order to celebrate the fluidity of subjectivity and body.

Returning to *The Lesbian Body* with this argument in mind, we can read the text as a challenge to heteronormative discourses of sexuality as well as a call to embrace the pleasures of the erosion of sexual identity found in queer sexual subculture. Because the emphasis in the text is on the decomposition of the "I" and the "you" "feature by feature", it disrupts rigid sexual positioning where a masculine body penetrates a feminine body, but it also forwards the porousness of every body, the potential for each body to be entered, for each body to become fluid despite even non-normative sexual identity formation. Readers encounter this fluidity as the penetrator and the penetrated reverse multiple times in the text, defying the maintenance of stable sexual roles. Indeed, the lovers enjoy a fluidity of sexual performance, touching and being touched, eating and being eaten, to effluvial release. Further, Wittig's lesbians move past a focus on genitalia as the only site of sexual pleasure and discover other sites for bodily stimulation; while the lesbians "confuse" sexual roles, they also create sexual "organs" from stomach, heart and excretory system as in the previous quotations, but also from tongue, bone, muscle and, in the following passage, the ear:

M/y most delectable one / set about eating you, m/y tongue moistens the helix of your ear delicately gliding around, m/y tongue inserts itself in the auricle, it touches the antihelix, m/y teeth seek the lobe, they begin to gnaw on it, m/y tongue gets into your ear canal. / spit, / fill you with saliva. Having absorbed the external part of your ear /

burst the tympanum, / feel the rounded hammer-bone rolling between m/y lips, m/y teeth crush it, / find the anvil and the stirrup bone, / crunch them, / forage with my fingers, / wrench away bone, / fall on the superb cochlea bone and membrane all wrapped round together, / devour them, / burst the semicircular canals, / ignore the mastoid, / make an opening in the maxilla, / study the interior of your cheek, / look at you from inside yourself, / lose my/self, / go astray, / am poisoned by you who nourish m/e, / shrivel, / become quite small, now / am a fly, / block the working of your tongue, vainly you try to spit m/e out, you choke, / am a prisoner, / adhere to your pink and sticky palate, / apply m/y suckers to your uvula. (1976, p. 22)

Here, the "I" orally stimulates the external ear, licking the lobe and spiraling the tongue from helix to antihelix, taking an active role in unraveling the "you." The "delectable you" inspires the "I" to salivate with desire; the excremental response of the "I" in the form of glandular release at the sight and then taste of the beloved becomes oral ejaculate, filling and then bursting the beloved with juicy excess. If we read this passage as metaphor, we might argue that the "I" enters the ear of the "you" so that the sound of excessive desire might work its way into the flesh, inviting the "you" to hear eros differently, to feel reverberating sound as corrosive excreta, not implanting identity or dictating movement but rather calling for rupture. While the "I" studies the "you" from inside the body, the aural penetration – sound and saliva – sticks to the palate and uvula of the "you". Thus, the ecstatic speech of the "you" is marred and made inarticulate, coherent language blocked as the "you" is sucked into sexual encounter that cannot be named. Still, as the "I" fills the "you" with salivary excreta, the penetrating self is "lost" and "goes astray"; feeling the beloved burst, feeding as a fly on the decay of the "you", the "I" experiences the self as willing "prisoner" caught in the explosive unravelling of the beloved. Eating the "you" – taking in the choking groans of pleasure – the "I" adheres to the mouth of the "you", leaking out, singing out, to penetrate the "I" with saliva and sound. "I" eat "you" to excess so that "you" wash "me" away in an excremental flow. Through the rupture of the "you", the "I" comes to hear the pleasures of the self as decay, but also to mingle or to unite with the excreta of another. This is not a union of gendered bodies interlocking, but bodies flowing to meet in an excremental puddle, dissolving into waste together.

This is most clear in passages where the “I” and the “you” are both perforated, where penetrator and penetrated collapse as the two decompose into each other:

Perforations occur in your body and in m/y body joined together, our homologously linked muscles separate, the first current of air that infiltrates into the breech spreads at a crazy speed, creating a squall within you and within m/e simultaneously. ... The orifices multiply over our two bodies causing m/y skin and your skin to burst alike. They are prolonged by tunnels whence the blood does not spurt. The wind enters everywhere, in every hole.... It becomes so violent that it precipitates us one against each other, it brings us down, it flattens us. Under its pressure there is nothing else to do but to attempt to insinuate ourselves one into the other. ... In the end a tempest arrives, it rushes right through us, scattering the muscles. First I hear your cries, then I hear m/yself cry out as you do, there is a bellowing of sirens, they reverberate within the gaping tunnels on either side of our two bodies which now constitute a single organism pervaded by vibrations quivering full of its own current, is it not so m/y dearest? (1976, p. 108)

While the previous quotations display a penetrator bringing the beloved outside of the self, this passage highlights the “holey-ness” of both bodies, the openness of both bodies to infiltration and dispersal. Though the bodies of “you” and “I” join together, they both reveal gaping pores through which worldly breath passes. Thus, their sexual squall uncovers multiple orifices in skin, stomach, loins, neck and cranium, awakening the lovers to the possibility of ecstatic stimulus beyond the vaginal culvert inspired by the wind’s violent speed. They are not simply holes to be filled, but come to feel their bodies as “tunnels” into which others burrow and through which others may pass. Indeed, it is the wind that teaches the lesbians of their porousness and reminds them of their homologous structure as each body can be – will be – opened, consumed and engulfed as fertile matter. Traversed by air, the lesbians burst from their distinct identities and become liquid, precipitating against each other, leaking into each other and out into the world. Flattened into each other, they cry out in pleasure at worldly stimulus of every body part as the tempest pulls them beyond previous understandings of bodily pleasure by making them excrete from multiple orifices. Through excretion they fold into each other,

“constituting a single organism” that is still porous and shot through with vibration. The wind takes them as homos, similarly structured bodies that can be penetrated and passed through, that can be touched to release out into worldly union. Taking their cue from unproductive pleasures discovered in worldly frottage, the lesbians embrace this fluidity where “you” and “I” cease to be distinct, where “you” and “I” share our porousness, where “you” and “I” mingle and converge in the “current” of excremental eros, the flow beyond ourselves out into each other and the world.

Through passages like these, Wittig disrupts the Genesis narrative of subjectivity, revising this Judeo-Christian origin story by countering the mythic separation of human being from other matter.¹¹ Like feminist theologians such as Phyllis Trible (1978, especially pp. 1–30) and Rosemary Radford Ruether (1993), Wittig puts pressure on the ways in which this particular origin story establishes or is deployed to establish binary distinctions between man and woman as well as an antagonism between humanity and earth. Indeed, worldly “breath” does not animate a distinct subject who comes to life to exhale linguistic categorisation of self and other beings – to name and to identify different qualities of being as in the story of Genesis – but instead unravels the separation of human from environment. In this way, Wittig critiques an origin myth that asserts the distinction of man from woman and man from soil (Ha-adamah). Wittig constructs an alternate Genesis myth where lesbians fold themselves back into soil through ecstatic death:

The soil of the garden slides between your teeth, your saliva moistens it, you feed m/e with it your tongue in m/y mouth your hands on m/y cheeks holding m/e still, I am transformed into mud m/y legs m/y sex m/y thighs m/y belly standing between your legs glutted with the smell of the vaginal secretion rising from your middle, I liquefy within and without. ... The mud reaches the muscles of m/y thighs, it touches m/y sex, it coats m/e cold and slippery, m/y labia retracting it spreads to m/y abdomen m/y kidneys m/y shoulderblades the nape of m/y neck which is circumvented in its turn, m/y neck bows, you still holding m/y cheeks in your hands filling m/e with saliva and earth your tongue against m/y gums. M/y muscles separate from each other in sodden masses. M/y entire body is overwhelmed. A very strong smell of moist earth spreads around. I see plants rooted in the fibres of m/y muscles. (1976, p. 70)

Wittig returns readers to a Garden of Eden transformed as the beloved “you” shows the “I” the pleasures of erosion, the pleasures of returning home to an earth lover. The “you” secretes saliva and vaginal fluid, mixing the excreta of the body with the soil of the earth and pushing this mixture into the mouth of the “I,” soiling the distinction between lover and beloved, subject and earth. As the “you” liquefies with the touch of soil, so, too, the body of the “I” drips out into the world inspired by the “smell of vaginal secretion” and the pressure of mud filling the holes of the body and wrapping around the flesh. The “I” feels the self “retracting” to let the lover and the soil of the world inside the folds of the labia; further, the “I” “bows” and then separates, falling away from distinct subjectivity and into worldly enrapture. The unraveling of this creation story revolves around unwinding narratives of gendered distinction where bodies unite in waste. No Adam and no Eve emerge from soil animated by divine breath with the knowledge of their separation from each other or from other beings. Indeed, sexual encounter marks the unmaking of humanity.

By lesbianising Genesis in this passage, Wittig highlights the distortion of women’s sexuality in creation stories, but also in depictions of the “fall” where God designs women to “cleave” to their husbands, to undergo suffering in childbirth as punishment and ultimately to experience death as a continuation of this punishment in which human distinction is erased in a return to cursed dust. Rather than accepting the limitation of women’s sexuality to suffering and pain, the revised Genesis myth asserts the pleasures of decomposing this divine mandate and shows how lesbian sex acts initiate bodies into different understandings of corporeal existence. As shown above, Wittig’s lesbians acknowledge excretion as an important sign of bodily pleasure that exceeds a divine or “natural” mandate for gendered sexual performance. However, in this passage and others, the representation of the fluidity of the body also signals a revision of a mythic despair in our connection to earth. Rather than experiencing horror in bodily decay that brings subjects into union with soil, lesbians delight in pleasurable decomposition because they already have shared of each other’s excreta and found it to be good. Thus, death becomes another transformation into the excremental self, another spreading of self into “moist earth” in unraveling of isolated subjectivity through “overwhelming” worldly engulfment. Lesbians are corpses in this text because they live in the ecstatic decay of their bodies – and the ecstatic decay of gender – but also because they refuse to understand the wasted body as terrible reminder of mortality. Instead, the delights of libidinal leakage, the splendour of secretion, are

reminders of the pleasures of mortal bodies, which transform understandings of loathsome death into an embrace with a loamy beloved who does not extinguish life, but unravels the flesh to fertilise other ways of being. What the reader finds here is not longing for the transcendence from the body, but instead a lesbian desire for the spreading out of excremental selves into other worldly bodies, a glorious union with and dissolution into the world. Lesbians do not die in the text; rather, they decay and transform, descending into soil and fertilising other forms of relationality and life. Thus, the “fall” into soil is not punishment and death is not seen as a horrid end to subjective difference, but instead, orgasmic excremental expulsion comes to symbolise the movement beyond the isolated self into union with the lover and the world. Indeed, erosion allows for the fertilisation of other life, the continuation of the transformed excremental self in the moistened soil that supports and feeds vegetation. Death, therefore, is not a terrible end, but a continuation for the fragmented “I” who comes apart to fertilise life, to fertilise other ways of imagining being.

In close, this piece is a provocation – some dribble – from a mass made sodden in meanderings through *The Lesbian Body*. Rereading it now, I find clefts in the argument, places to which “I” or “you” might return – spots that we might open and erode. I wonder, for example, how the text might be read with and against the work of feminist theologians from the 1970s and 1980s with greater force. Indeed, the text is part of an historical period in which feminists were engaged in some heavy palpitation of mythic structures that are or were animated to naturalise gender. It would be intriguing to go much further than I do here in bringing Wittig into conversation with scholars like Ruether, whose *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* continued to come to mind as I wrote the final section of the essay. I also wonder if the text might be brought into conversation with ecofeminists – the “power and promise of ecological feminism” as Karen Warren puts it – who “[provide] a distinctive framework both for reconceiving feminism and for developing an environmental ethic which takes seriously connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (1996, p. 19). Because *The Lesbian Body* offers vivid imagery of an earth lover who erodes human distinction from soil and from ecosystem, there is fertile ground here for future examination of how Wittig’s work might be brought to bear in discussions of queer environmentalism. These are just two final groans of an author exhausted with her most recent play with *The Lesbian Body*, two contented sighs meant as invitation for future play.

There is much more to do with *The Lesbian Body*, a text that I have wandered through many times over the years since I first came out. I recall my younger self who first stumbled upon this book, searching for some clue to my identity. How queer it was to find these fragments that do not speak to the formation of self, but instead to wreckage. To be lesbian would be much stranger than I originally had thought it would be. Now, in the middle of life, I still come out and come undone in this fragmented textual body, still revel in these letters of liquidity that disassemble me. And it is good to share this fluid self, *inter alia*, with theorists whose work, like Wittig's, continues to inspire the pleasurable erosion of my thinking. This piece is just a sweet nothing for those who have made me, and continue to make me through various types of intercourse, sweetly nothing.

Notes

¹ This essay is dedicated to Tatiana de la Tierra, a poet and friend to whose collection of poetry – *Para Las Duras* – I refer in the dedication. I also want to thank Tim Dean for encouraging me to submit an article for this special issue as well as Suzanne Edwards, Jenna Lay, Christopher Madson, Danielle Del Priore and Edurne Portela for suggestions on the development of the piece.

² For critiques of a political focus on "gay marriage", see Warner (1999), especially, 81–147. For a discussion of feminism and "gay marriage", see Ferguson (2007). Also, see *Against Equality: Queer Challenges to the Politics of Inclusion* (<http://www.againstequality.org/>).

³ For more on the form of the text, see Wittig (2005). She writes: "The book is formed in two parts. It opens and falls back upon itself. One can compare its form to a cashew, to an almond, to a vulva" (p. 48).

⁴ I refer here to Audre Lorde's essay, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" (1984, pp. 53–59).

⁵ Wittig writes: "Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ("forced residence", domestic corvée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become of to stay heterosexual" (1981, p. 108).

For discussions of responses to this claim that lesbians are not women, see de Lauretis (2005) and Epps and Katz (2007).

- ⁶ For an explanation of Wittig's philosophical understanding of naturalised sex and gender, see Crowder (2005). She writes: "For a materialist like Wittig, gender is not at all an arbitrary set of roles or expectations superimposed on biological sex. Rather, these roles and expectations follow logically and inevitably from a material exploitation of the class of "women" by the class of "men." That exploitation, and the material benefits men derive from it, determines both sex and gender, the former being used... as a convenient "naturalizing" excuse for imposing the latter" (2005, p. 65). Also see Butler: "there is no reason to divide up human bodies into male and female sexes except that such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality. Hence, for Wittig, there is no distinction between sex and gender; the category of "sex" is itself a gendered category, fully politically invested, naturalized but not natural (1999, p.143).
- ⁷ I refer here to the final chapter of Foucault's *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*: "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures" (1990, p.157).
- ⁸ Cope and Shaktini's arguments about Wittig's usage of "j/e" counter Judith Butler's assertion about Wittig's linguistic play: "The j/e of *The Lesbian Body* is supposed to establish the lesbian, not as a split subject, but as the sovereign subject who can wage war linguistically against a 'world' that has constituted a semantic and syntactic assault against the lesbian" (1999, p. 153). My argument follows Shaktini and Cope's analyses of Wittig's poetic formal experimentation that reveal the unravelling of "you" and "I", not the assumption of "an absolute perspective that imposes its categories on the entire linguistic field," as Butler states (p. 153).
- ⁹ See Butler (1999) for a discussion of fragmentation in Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*: "As 'sex' fragments the body, so the lesbian overthrow of 'sex' targets as models of domination those sexually differentiated norms of bodily integrity that dictate what 'unifies' and renders coherent the body as a sexed body. In her theory and fiction, Wittig shows that the 'integrity' and 'unity' of the body, often thought to be positive ideals, serve the purposes of fragmentation, restriction, and domination" (p. 146).
- ¹⁰ See Wittig (1981). She writes that understandings of women's bodies are
- [d]istorted to such an extent that our deformed body is what they call "natural," what is supposed to exist as such before oppression. Distorted to such an extent that in the end oppression seems to be a consequence of this "nature" within ourselves (a nature which is only an *idea*). What a materialist analysis does by reasoning, a lesbian society accomplishes practically: not only is there no natural group "women" (we lesbians are living proof of it), but as individuals as well we question "woman," which for us, as for Simone de Beauvoir, is only a myth (p.103).

¹¹ For discussion of other mythic revisions in this text, including the rewriting of the Eurydice and Orpheus story in *The Lesbian Body*, see Shaktini (1982).

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The Darkness Within¹

Ian Haig

There is a substance that sits outside of the more familiar categories of bodily fluids and the emissions of pus, tears, vomit, semen, breast milk, urine, sweat and excrement; one that defies categorisations and reason. This unclassifiable substance coats the walls of your colon, your moist mucus membranes layered with a thick, slimy and terrible material which goes by the even stranger name of mucoid plaque. As an artist I am drawn to these 'off limits' regions of the body, my art practice premised on putting bodily reality back into the hygienic and sterile context of the gallery.

Mucoid plaque² is quite possibly the most disturbing of all body fluids, due largely to its unclassifiability. Unlike the secretions of tears, semen, urine, vomit and a host of other corporeal substances with a clearly understood bodily and biological purpose, the function of mucoid plaque is more mysterious and ambiguous. The alternative medicine fraternity claim that this disgusting material resides deep in our bowels, polluting our interiors with tentacles of pure abjection. It builds up as a lining along the colon walls of toxic material, harboring all manner of parasites, impacted fecal matter and colonic sludge. Mucoid plaque is post-shit – no mere excrement here – for mucoid plaque is shit transformed into an entirely new monster from the depths of your colon. The theory is mucoid plaque develops over a number of years as layers of mucus and food residue begins to coat the gastrointestinal tract. It is eliminated through colon cleansing, and a variety of herbal products targeted to cleanse the body of harmful plaques.

Nonetheless, it appears that mucoid plaque is generated by the body to protect itself from infection and is, after all, a sign of the body doing its job. It is indeed part of you: in fact, the disgust generated by such material is no doubt partly caused by the inability to contemplate and rationalise such material as being from within you, of being part of your body. Here the colon is not just the bodily portal between the exterior and interior, but also a kind of gateway to the excesses of the body: not only the

evacuation tube of the unwanted, casting off what the body does not require as waste product, mucoid plaque manifests the misunderstood, the unknowable, the repressed and the unseen.



Mucoid plaque – *Dr Natura*

Mucoid plaque activates the physical sense of seeing, evoking a kind of intense staring born from disbelief for those who encounter it. We are unable to look away from such an abject substance, as we contemplate its incomprehensible existence within us. Film maker David Cronenberg has claimed that his earlier body horror films are concerned with “showing the un-showable and speaking the unspeakable” (1997, p. xvi). Mucoid plaque, like the realisation of Cronenberg’s unshowability, represents the body turned inside out. We see something of the moist interior of ourselves that we are never meant to see, elements of the body that probably should remain in the dark.

The visual excess represented by mucoid plaque triggers a refusal of its very materiality – it appears to us more like a prosthetic special effect from a movie than a substance of the physical body. John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982) comes to mind, a kind of other worldly goop that is not *of* the body but

has instead *invaded* it: a horrible substance not of this world; an alien blob from another dimension; a whole new species of bodily material. And alongside spectacular disbelief, the ability to frame in language what it is we are seeing also flounders; no words are adequate to describe what has been made visible with the release of mucoid plaque from the body. Indeed, disgust and revulsion no longer seem either accurate or adequate adjectives to encompass the phenomenon.

Indeed, mucoid plaque is not actually believed by practitioners of allopathic medicine to exist; they claim it to be a fiction of our bodies created by the alternative health evangelists and their obsessions with bodily cleansing. This rejection is perhaps unsurprising: as Ralph Rugoff articulates (1995, p. 49), physicians often resort to using pictures as a teaching aid when words are inadequate to explain the unseen interior of the body and, as such, “medicine is as much about educating the eye”. Both vision and language are put in crisis, the only recourse left to the medical community is wholesale denial.



Mucoid plaque – *Dr Natura*

Thus this thing, this putrid mass of weird bodily fluid, remains largely unknown and unacknowledged within conventional health circles. However, any casual Google image search reveals a plethora of disgusting examples of its existence. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, one would think we have finally gained an understanding of the body and its interior, that technology has provided us with every answer to the body's dark recesses, its organs entirely mapped out. However mucoid plaque confronts us and reminds us of the weird and putrid strangeness of our organic selves.



Mucoid Plaque – *Dr. Natura*

The ocular excess of mucoid plaque positions it as the car wreck of bodily fluids; like the morbid scene of an automobile accident, it is a material that is difficult to look at and difficult not to look at. Indeed, the substance makes its appearance regularly on various online alternative health forums such as *Cure Zone* and Google image searches. While it may be argued that we are losing sight of the materiality of the body in the digital age, conversely the body is entirely *over-visible* within certain online communities. The body on forums like *Cure Zone* is a body in a state of crisis, indeed in browsing the site one gets the feeling that the *natural* state of the body is that of disease, illness and not the body of health and well-being.

Cure Zone, for instance, features many forums devoted to the internal body and its associated pathologies, from gall stones, parasites and worms to other unrecognisable bodily secretions and fluids such as mucoid plaque. Images of inexplicable excreted fecal matter and all manner of other bodily material passed by one's bowel movement regularly makes an appearance in *Cure Zone* user postings. *Cure Zone* is ultimately a site devoted to assisting its user network to find alternative treatments to difficult medical conditions. However one can't help thinking that there is also a degree of voyeurism at play here, which revels in the freak show of the interior body on display, and in things revealed about our bodies that one would prefer not to know. The internal body here is rendered entirely visible and exposed, taking Facebook's notion of the visible self – where every personal detail is revealed online – to strange and perverse new bodily heights.

Indeed my own discovery of the mysterious mucoid plaque was via the web, through a listing for an alternative health product. The body in crisis it would seem are well and truly alive online, if not the body we are familiar with.



The entire detox movement, involving purging cures and cleansing regimes, is aimed at targeting the unseen, interior body, as the well of disease and corruption of bad bacteria and toxic overloads. Bizarrely, the rise in alternative therapies like detoxing and colonic irrigation, with their intense focus on the interior body, is occurring in an age of extreme exteriors of the body: the popularity of these purification methods are now almost directly proportionate to the popularity of beautifying plastic surgery procedures, liposuction, botox injections and other external body makeovers. The contemporary body exists in an amplified state of hyper-extended interior/exterior.

Yet the goop of mucoid plaque introduces a problematic in-between state into this internal–external binary; it suggests a transition of one body mass melting into another. As William Ian Miller (1998, p. 106) points out, materials that are slimy, gooey and squishy are disgusting to us because they represent things in a state of flux. Like life, “there is no fixed point. All is flux and in flux” (Miller, 1998, p. 106), a series of loose and slippery recurrences, for nothing stands still or is static.



One of the more disturbing aspects of mucoid plaque, then, is that it appears to be part of us, unlike other bodily fluids which almost operate on an ontological level of being separate. A discharge, an evacuation of the bowels, or fluid ejaculate – bodily fluids are largely on their way *out* of the body. Mucoid plaque, however, remains buried, in some cases for years hidden and deathly quiet inside one's bowels. It is entirely unseen; its release is often met with the idea that one has actually removed part of their own colon, as mucoid plaque, having spent many years inside the warm, wet and dark corners of your body, retains the shape of the colon once it exits. It is the body inverted, as the exterior and interior body collapse into one another.

Finally, mucoid plaque challenges the very concept of disease itself. While the perception exists that diseases like cancers and tumors are somehow separate from the body while inherently being part of it, mucoid plaque is implicitly bodily material that has suddenly made itself visible. Unlike other diseases, mucoid plaque does not attack the body like some perceived external force, but rather forms a weird and disturbing symbiotic relationship to the body. It is the incarnation and manifestation of bodily disease itself. Indeed, Kellogg Cornflakes founder and alternative health evangelist John Harvey Kellogg declared as much when he claimed death begins in the colon when discussing his theory of autointoxication and the body being polluted by its own toxic overload. (2000, p. 183)



Physicians in seventeenth-century London were compelled to dissect the body in order to understand it in an integrated manner as a series of interconnected and related organs – of the blood pumping through the heart, the bile secreted from the gallbladder. Before an understanding of cell biology, evolutionary theory and the development of sophisticated microscopes, a search for the interior body was no doubt connected to the larger quest for a search for the human soul.

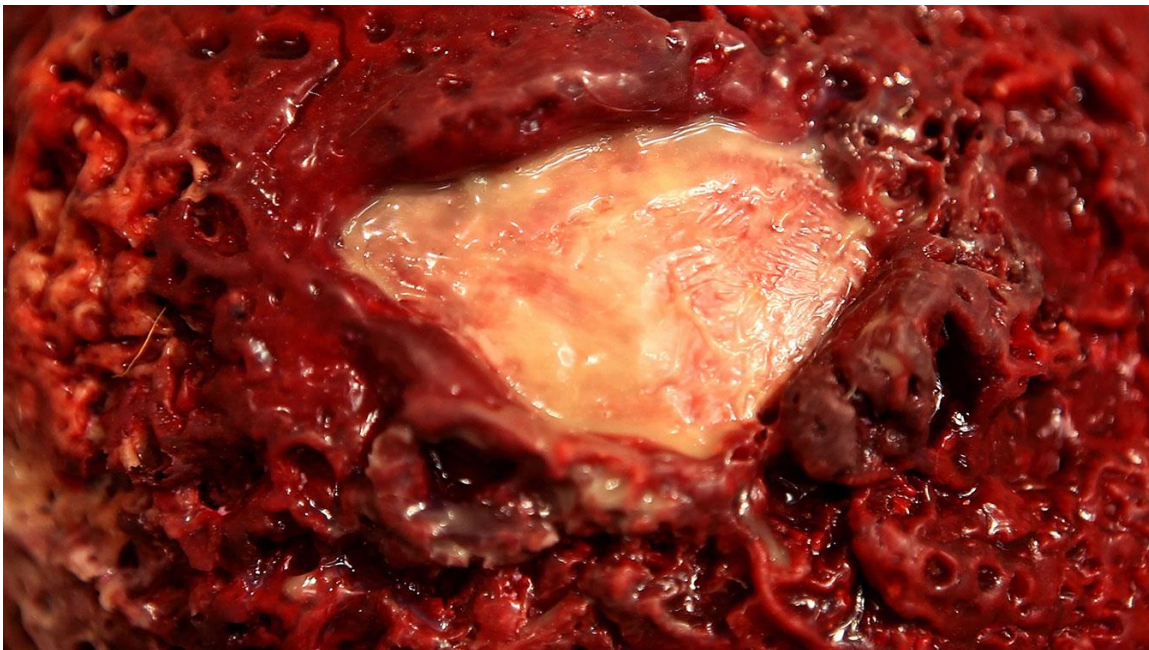
In such a context, mucoid plaque takes on an entirely abject meaning: deep within the body, this foul and corrupt bodily material is more like the bodily abyss of hell than the ethereal house of the soul. Mucoid plaque would appear as anti-life and anti-human matter; it is death itself inside the warm cavity of our body and a reminder that our very bodies carry the seeds of our own destruction deep within.

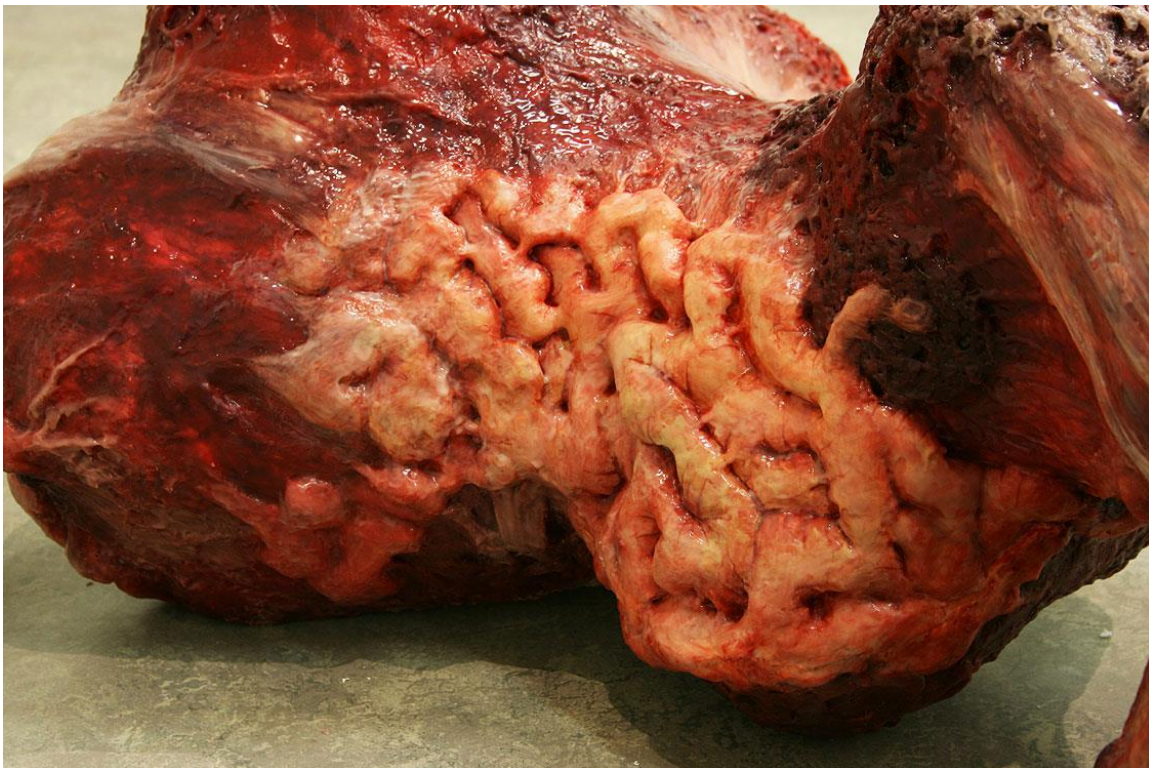
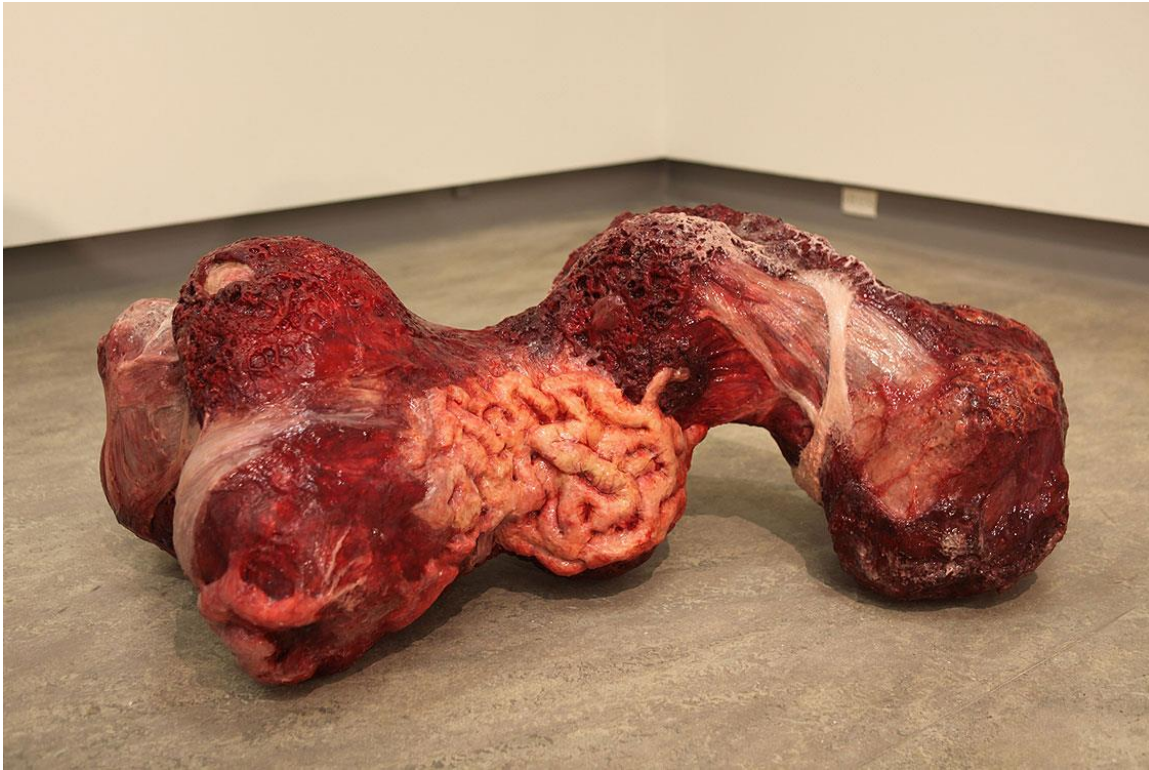


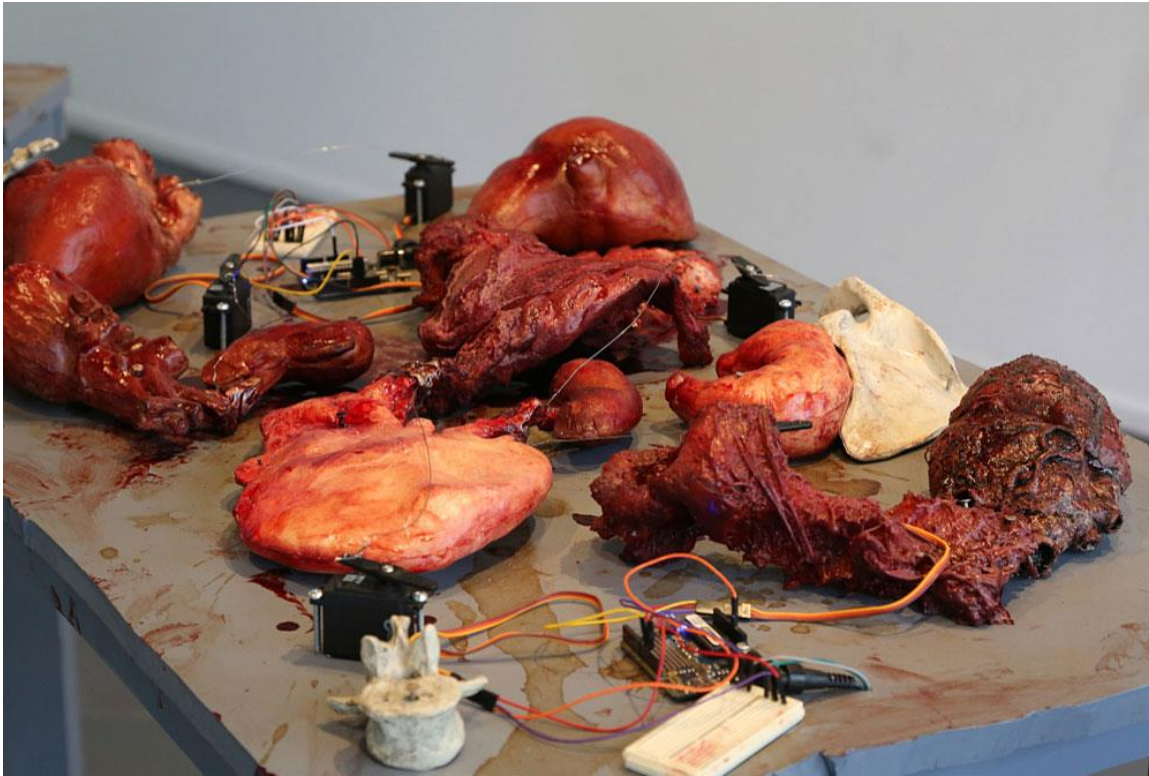
Georges Bataille too comments on feces and its relationship to death: *"The horror we feel at the thought of a corpse is akin to the feeling we have at human excreta"* (1986, p. 57, my emphasis). As Bataille articulates there is an implicit relationship to death and shit. In the end, mucoid plaque is possibly death incarnate, a death that we carry around with us every day in the form of a bodily fluid that we are only just beginning to see, let alone understand.











Notes

¹ Note: all images have been reproduced from Google.

² For a detailed explanation of mucoid plaque see <http://detox.net.au/mucoid-plaque-and-mucus/> (viewed 23rd Feb, 2014).

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Tender Fluid Machines

Ania Chromik

Fluids are vagabond stuff: they travel easily and are difficult to stop. Engulfing, volatile and clingy – you can never be sure you have got rid of them for good as you might in the case of solids. Unlike solids which are cast once and for all and resist “separation of the atoms,” liquids, according to Zygmunt Bauman, “neither fix space nor bind time” (2000, p. 2). Liquidity threatens to annihilate the boundary between Self and Other. Fluids defy my alleged autonomy and self-identity as a subject by reminding me of the permeability of my own body, of its vulnerability to collapse into other bodies and being collapsed into, and of the feeble conventionality and volatility of the very Self/Other division. Referring to the liminal potentiality of fluids, this article poses a series of open-ended questions problematizing this fragile division, at the same time liquidizing the formal distinction between theory and poetry and between speculation and corporeal praxis.

The fluid refuses to conform to the “laws governing the clean and proper, the solid and self-identical” (Grosz, 1994, p. 195), and thus becomes an anti-thesis of self-contained subjectivity – this clearly delineated, coherent self that always stays “in itself” and does not mix with the world. Fluids seep, infiltrate, contaminate and flow; they threaten the self with disruptive disclosures of the constructedness of the unified body /self image, and thus pose a threat of throwing the self back into the undifferentiated and immanent experience of immediate continuity with the world. Elizabeth Grosz also claims that what is disquieting about fluidity is its cultural unrepresentability within prevailing philosophical models of ontology (1994, p. 195). While the broad field of body and identity studies (including corporeal feminism, queer studies, psychoanalysis, cultural materialism, etc.) have always acknowledged the significance of bodily fluids, the actual “messy” experience of insecure boundaries, seepages, leakages and engulfment is rarely referred to outside a frame which reduces the materiality of bodies to systems of signification.

If there is a potential for opening up a lateral and a more affirmative perspective on the liquidated subjectivity, it is, I believe, in experimenting on living organisms by appropriating and linking modes of experience that might seem radically speculative, yet capable of producing unexpected

modes of affectivity. My paper therefore probes the juxtaposition of the Deleuzean-Guattarian concept of bodily assemblage with the metaphorical constructions of the pre-/anti-Cartesian fluid merger with the world represented by the humoural¹ and grotesque body² in order to speculate how it might affect the redefinition of becomings. The poetics which carries Deleuze's refiguring of the ontology of subjectivity in terms of temporary linkages, intensities and flows, as well as his notion of the body as an assembly of organs, discontinuous series of processes, and exchanges of corporeal substances and energies coincides with the discourse of the humoural body/self as described by the materialist critique of early modern discourse. Both concepts deconstruct the self-contained, self-identical, cohesive subject and propose instead a mode of being that is open, fungible, trans-fluxible, permeable and volatile. The question is whether filtering the concept of the assemblage through the optics of another highly speculative theoretical construct would broaden the nomenclature of coming-together (rather than being), and thus whether assuming the volatile model has the power to render the experience of assemblage more palpable – palpable enough to move it to the realm of experience.

Bearing in mind that the "humoural corporeality" is a highly processed construct made up of the imagery used in the critique of the "contained" and "solid" modern subject, I have no intention of creating an intellectual argument here. I also misappropriate the idiom of the humoural body in a boldly nonchalant way, treating it as my literary material in an approach which is not philosophical but philological. Modern conceptualisations of pre-subjectivity interest me as digested poetic tropes; as accumulations of nouns and adjectives, reverberations, metaphors, metonymies, and so on. But it is precisely in this superficial appropriation of the poetics on which the critical discourse operates, that I see a certain dislocating potential for the thought experiment which this discussion aims to perform. So this paper should ideally open a mode of affectivity which creates new thought linkages and sensual experiences producing unexpected intensities. *In this discussion, the emphasis on sense and tactility, on the fleshy materiality of our own skins and organs, and, consequently, on affect, creates, what I see as a space for talking practice. It is my own bodily experience I experiment with, trying on this or that sensation, making miniscule movements towards this or that tingle, attuning myself to foreign feelings for a while, burrowing into this or that fragment of self/world relation.* It has to be done this way, as Deleuze and Guattari point to the connection between the body without organs replacing organism and experimentation replacing interpretation (2003, p. 162). *It is very much about investing the humoural / grotesque body with some palpable tenderness*

experienced in the body – in our bodies. Such an approach is also informed by the broad “practical” question behind the experiment – that is, how to make a Body without Organs – and an instruction which frames my speculations:

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small spot of new land at all times. (...) It is only here that the BwO reveals itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities.

(Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 162)

There is still space within this prescription for looking for modes of affectivity which might facilitate the process on the level of lived embodiment. Now, what happens if I lodge myself in the virtual concept of the fluid humoural corporeality and use it as a booster to intensify the process? Just assemble these two concepts (that is, the Deleuzian assemblage and the humoural/grotesque body) and see what it does to both of them. Are they capable of forming a molecular connection which will change the quality of each of them in a new assemblage thus formed?

What makes the humoural/grotesque body interesting in this context is its capacity for creating a fluid and temporary conceptual machine with any model of embodiment which challenges the solid atomistic version of a separate body tightly contained within its skin and immune to any cross-contaminations with other bodies. Unlike a competent subject of modernity, it is construed as unable to keep itself safely “in” the body and therefore posing a threat to self-identity by spilling or leaking into the world and into the Other. It is marked with a potential re-immersion into the pre-subjective flux of experience dominated by the sensual and corporeal impulses of the undifferentiated Self/World union. The grotesque body especially – emphasising its bodily secretions, convexities and orifices, marked by interchanges and interorientations, as well as dismemberment and fusion with other bodies – represents a mode of corporeality which spills out of itself, absorbs the world and is itself absorbed by it. Described as “mobile and hybrid,” “disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing its limits, obscenely decentred and off-balance” (Stallybrass & White, 1986, p. 14), and never quite complete, it is a perfect epitome of “matter out

of place" (Douglas, 2006). However, unlike the Kristevan notion of the abject (Kristeva, 1982), it is constructed as a *celebration* of pollution, openness, and lack of demarcation. The positive reconceptualisation of grotesque corporeality is about reaffirming its capability to create new modes of intersubjectivity – or rather temporary intersubjective states – through spillages, seepages, cross-contaminations, momentary interchanges, gaping wounds, merges, blurring, infections, flowing into the Other, swallowing the world and being swallowed by the world (see: Bakhtin, 1984, p. 317).

Whereas the Cartesian paradigm is often depicted as the solid foundation of the modern biomedical model in which the body is regarded as a mechanism/organism consisting of separate yet connected parts, the notion of the humoural body from before the scientific revolution evokes the sense of fluid and machinic connections, a microcosm within the macrocosm, of a human body immersed or mortised (as Owen Barfield has it) into the universe. In his relation to his environment, writes Barfield, the man of the Middle Ages was "rather less like an island, rather more like an embryo" (Barfield, p.78). Yet another fluid trope in the concept of the intrauterine sense of continuity with the world is the immanence and immediacy of experience identified with an asubjective or pre-subjective mode of being in the world (as opposed to the transcendental human/subjective experience mediated by boundaries and divisions implied by the famous Bataillean notion of the animalistic immersion in the world "like water in water" (Bataille, 1989, pp. 19, 23, 25). In a way, the animalistic continuity between self and world marked by a certain permeability which implies no distinct boundary between the inside and the outside (actually invalidating the very distinction) is a pervasive metaphor in humoural medicine and microcosm/macrocosm relations.

It is clear, writes Barfield about the speculative humoural man, "that he did not feel himself isolated by his skin from the world outside to quite the same extent that we do," with "each different part of him being united to a different part of the universe by some invisible threads" (Barfield, p.53). The connections and unities are not within the organism, but between organs, humours, and elements. The links would not be made so much between, for instance, one's liver and one's pancreas as the model of the organism suggests, but between one's liver, the element of air, and the planet Mars, with the skin boundary being much more provisional than we are used to it. The invisible humoural

threads that connect the organs and the extracorporeal elements remind us of the fiber Deleuze and Guattari describe in *One Thousand Plateaus*:

A fiber stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible. Every fiber is a Universe fiber. A fiber strung across borderlines constitutes a line of flight or of deterritorialization.

(Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p 249)

Similarly, the humoral body appears to be better connected with the universe than it is with itself, in the sense that it does not produce an organism of interlocking and finite connections between organs within the skin, but rather machinic linkages circumventing the skin boundary, which intensify the potential of each individual fragment respectively. The humoral body connects to other bodies, animate and inanimate, linking organs and biological processes to material and cosmic objects while refusing to subordinate the body to a unity and central order of an organism. The humours, as the major conceptual frame of the pre-scientific *Weltanschauung*, are thus portrayed as a part of the world in the human being – the humours would wax and wane, depending on the workings of the elements. Unlike the tightly bound modern agent keeping the self safely “in” the body, the pre-modern man is characterised by the imagery of porous boundaries and exchanges of elements with the surroundings, with the surface of his body open to be permeated by fluids and air (Vigarello, 2005, p. 219). The model of constant pulsating flux, or, as Charles Taylor has it, “attunement” (Taylor, 1989, p. 155) construes man as responsive to the frequencies and rhythms of the elements (see: Vigarello, 2005, p. 219). Such a body can neither resist external pressures, nor can it contain its internal seepages. Gail Kern Paster, for example, describes it as a “porous and fragile envelope” (Kern Paster, 1993, p. 12), or a “semipermeable, irrigated container” in which humours rise and ebb (Kern Paster, 1993, p. 8). Among other things, this image informs numerous descriptions of an alleged fifteenth and sixteenth century’s belief that water could ooze into the body through the pores of the skin and thus, by disturbing the fragile harmony of humours and inciting the liquid element in a human, mechanically alter bodily functions (see: Vigarello, 2005, p. 108).

It needs to be emphasized here that the point of this experiment is not just to show the correspondences between the fluid humoral sense of open boundary and the Deleuzian concept,

but rather to see what these notion do to each other when linked. How do they transform, intensify and maximise each other? How does this assemblage widen our sensorium? I believe that the humoural body, intensified as a Deleuzian concept, is affected in an affirmative way: it now invites us to refigure the imagery of immersion, the microcosm-within-macrocosm image, that otherwise would suggest some higher-order machine endowed with a sense of bounded unity and telos. It encourages us to ask what happens if the transcendent organiser of the linkages between organs and elements in the humoural model, the divine guarantor of *harmonia mundis*, is replaced with the immanent sense of nothing more than the connections and productions that make it. The fleshy physicality of the humoural model (as opposed to the prevalent contemporary symbolic reading of the humours) provokes a question: what would happen if we began to think of the body-self not in terms of depth and organism but in terms of this kind of open boundary? How might this conceptual reorientation – a rejection of the experience of the self as a bounded organism, in favour of experiencing the skin as a semipermeable membrane – allow for a reconfiguration of the praxis of molecular connections of our organs with water, air, particles of food, fragments of tissues of other bodies? And, finally, how does the humoural body sensualise the Deleuzian concept? If the Body without Organs (BwO), as Deleuze and Guattari have it, is simultaneously an exercise or experimentation and a limit, something we never reach but are always already attaining (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p.149-150), then this impossible process of becoming can only be facilitated by sensualisation. The operation of creating the momentary assemblage of the humoural body without organs embraces a tender affirmation and impossibility. It creates productive space by adding this extra fleshy, tangible, sensory dimension to the concept of assemblage.

The productive space opens up a dimension for fluid praxis: embracing the humoural model produces a sense of incorporation foreign to our sanitised conceptual-corporeal frame. And this is a physical sensation, starting with an invitation to play with the idea of such an experience – of a torsion into the Other, becoming more prone, more open, to intrusions and cross-contaminations. Morris Berman describes an attempt at recreating the humoural sense of participation of the Self and Non-Self at the moment of experience: “[M]y skin has no boundary. I am out of my mind, I have become my environment” (Berman, 1981, p. 72). Becoming one’s environment in the humoural context is not mimicry, neither is it a total submergence of oneself into the Other. The merger will never be quite complete, it will never *have* been – it is not about claiming the Other,

never devouring the Other, but rather a line pointing to a certain direction – always already in the movement that Deleuze and Guattari describe as dismantling the organism but not by killing it, but by “opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p.149-150).

The metaphor of “becoming the environment” as merger that is never quite finished also characterizes the Bakhtinian grotesque body. It is marked by the sense of an open boundary: not separated from the rest of the world – never closed and completed – emphasizing those parts of the body through which the world enters or emerges, “through which the body itself goes out to meet the world” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 26). Associations with Kristevan abjection are unavoidable: just like the abject, the grotesque body constantly poses a risk of blurring the frail construction of the Subject/Object distinction, haunting the self at the most vulnerable sites of its constructed boundaries – its openings and cavities, bodily pollution, reproductive functions, death. It also draws us “towards a place where meaning collapses” and is defined in opposition to its own *corps propre* (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2) – “one’s own and clean proper body” (Roudiez, 1982, p. viii),³ that is, the classical body.⁴ While abjection is an obvious trope here, I believe that it might be more refreshing to probe for another, more affirmative perspective.⁵ The question I want to ask in this context is thus: what happens if the grotesque body, instead of being jettisoned, is celebrated? When I lose myself in it, and instead of experiencing abjection, I open myself to the productive aspect of this encounter? In other words, the body which, through its liminal character, questions transcendent subjectivity in a sensual way and constitutes a plane for the invasion of the semiotic – either by abjection or by tender embrace.

It is precisely the carnivalesque aspect of the grotesque body that invites this tender and celebratory openness rather than a reaction based on rejection and disgust. Bakhtin refers to the grotesque body as “the ever unfinished, ever creating body” (1984, p. 26) – the body that says yes to matter around it and freely creates connections and bonds. Abusive and devouring, never sealed off, never quite finished, always exceeding its limits in eating, drinking, defecating, urinating, copulating, getting pregnant giving birth and dying, the grotesque body is constantly creating new connections with the world and thus constituting a body without organs. The grotesque body is an ever-embracing body: its fleshy folds permeate and enfold the Other, but never in a penetrating

way – there is no sense of interiority here, no desire based on depth, no lack that has to be filled by the Other. There is rather a playful interplay of surfaces and making machinic connections. The grotesque body devours and grows, bursts and shifts, fucks and falls apart, outgrows itself and disrespects body boundaries, but, most importantly, it does it all **out in the open**; with no sense of hidden interiority, it “goes out to meet the world” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 26). Bakhtin writes:

Eating, drinking, defecating and other elimination (sweating, blowing the nose, sneezing) as well as ‘copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up of another body – all of these acts are performed on the confines of the outer world.

(Bakhtin, 1984, p. 317)

There is no sense of concealed depth behind the enfolding fold, there is nothing beyond what is already on top and exposed. The connections that the grotesque body makes with other bodies (human and inhuman) are not those of interiority and exteriority, but rather those of linkages, sequences of surfaces, alignments, intensities, redistributing organs and confluences. The surface becomes a plane open to flows and circulations of the machines that compose it. The emphasis is on the organs, not on the organism, and, most importantly, the grotesque body emphasises orifices, apertures and convexities: the open mouth, the genitals, the anus, the nose, the ear, the breasts. However, these are not gaping holes revealing the vast abyss of deep bodily interior. Rather, they constitute sites of cross-contaminations and open boundaries **on the surfaces** of intensity where the organs of one grotesque body merge with other organs and with the world:

All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation [...]. (Bakhtin, 1984, p.317)

The *modus operandi* of the grotesque body is the exchange of elements with the surroundings – what might be theorised as a movement towards the Other, exposing one’s openness in an act of tender vulnerability to the Other that is just about to flow into me. A constant flux, a seepage with no delineation and no sense of self. A body marked by incontinence with all the ambiguous implications of the word: by its inability to restrain and control its corporeal fluxes, by not being a tight container, not respecting demarcated subjectivities, and by its effluence, permeability and

leakiness. (see: Paster 1993, p. 92) The body that secretes fluids, opens up, gapes with its orifices, refuses to stay within its borders, and seeps into the Other, contaminates the Other with itself and permeates the Other's boundaries. The infection spreads through the openings and transfers the properties of one into the other. The rupture that breaks through the continuity of the bounded self is what Kristeva describes as the symptoms of abjection: "a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). The anxiety of an alien in the self is an expression of the phobia of tenuous boundaries: the mingling and blending of identities. Abjection therefore exists in contrast to desire: the pre-objectal relationship precedes the emergence of the subject / object distinction necessary for the operation of desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis (see: Kristeva, 1982, pp. 10-11). But, again, the Deleuzian perspective lets me embrace an affirmative and productive dimension of this contamination which, if the obsessive stress on integrity is given up, can be perceived as alliance producing "assemblages capable of plugging into desire" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p.166) Assemblages are composed of heterogeneous elements, and the contagion happens not only on the level of breaking the continuity of a bounded entity, but is also connected to the heightening of the potential of the elements in play. The Deleuzian perspective, unlike the Lacanian one, does not associate desire with lack or something that exists outside the movement towards the Other, but as the immanent force which, "does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009, p. 26).

This entirely different concept of connections between bodies / fragment of bodies / material objects / biological processes / social practice forces the reconfiguration of the body understood in terms of its subordination to a higher organization. Instead of a body contaminating another body, the notion of an assemblage (or machine) opens up an image of provisional conjunctions and disjunctions of discontinuous elements, all of them at the same level: "An assemblage has neither base nor superstructure, neither deep structure nor superficial structure; it flattens all of its dimensions onto a single plane of consistency upon which reciprocal presuppositions and mutual insertions play themselves out" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 90). What I think is crucial for the application of the Deleuzian-Guattarian frame to the grotesque body understood in terms of the exchange of elements or (affirmative) contamination, is that fragments of bodies can come together and align themselves to produce Deleuzian machines mainly through the mediation of

bodily fluids and discharges from the orifices (see: Grosz, 1994, p. 120) In other words, the apertures and flows of discharge facilitate the machinic connections thus creating more and more series of becoming and lines of flight, new beginnings; the awesome “monstrous birth.” *The secretion therefore anticipates the assemblage through the enjoyment of opening to a whole world of intensities that are not my own*, the joy of becoming Other. The grotesque body is a rhizome: the focus on bodily fluids and flows emphasises its quality as interbeing, *intermezzo*, always in movement, sending out liquid emissaries before the actual solidities of the organs can meet, thus reminding us of the excess of life, of the fact that we are always already more than the hermetic self we think we are. Bodily fluids sensualise the Deleuzian *intermezzo* and make it more tangible – and the Bakhtinian perspective adds a sense of perpetual motion to it: this swarming, teeming ferment which denies the body any form of transcendence, subjectivity and property. Instead, there are only intensities that pass and circulate on its surface, fragments of bodies and objects, mutual insertions, flows, speeds, realignments, transmutations, pulsations, races, and tribes.

Once the fear of losing one’s subjectivity and the anxieties over the firmness of body boundaries are replaced with the carnivalesque affirmation of pervasive proximity, it is impossible to determine who is feeling what, whose organs are affected at a given point in time. *The softness of the moist encounter turns all machinic relations into lovemaking – whether it is making love, or eating, or surrendering to the bodily dispersion and pain*. Deleuze and Guattari write about a “real making love” that constitutes a “body upon which what serves as organs is distributed according to crowd phenomena in Brownian motion, in the form of molecular multiplicities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 30). The swarming sense of multiplicity requires a movement towards the humoral assemblage which can take place only through exposing my position in the act of tender hospitality, soft vulnerability to the Other-to-come/flow-into-me. I must construe my skin as a semipermeable membrane, open to cross-contaminations. I must reconfigure my skin as something that does not contain my body, but opens it to collapsing into and being collapsed into other bodies. I must reconfigure my digestive system, not as an abyss annihilating the food in a non-reciprocal act of consumption, but as a space for potential molecular connections in which particles of matter eaten form temporary alliances with particles of me, producing new qualities for the tasting and the tasted, the chewing and the chewed, the swallowing and the swallowed, the digesting and the digested. Replace abject revulsion with what Bracha L. Ettinger beautifully refers to as self-fragilization (2009, p. 3). I must open myself to an affirmative encounter beyond the notion of

desire defined as lack and depth – a matrixial interplay of surfaces, an elusive mobilisation of “erotic aerals” sensitive to transmissions and dispersions, forming a composite of porous trans-subjectivity.

Shuddering with disgust is a response of a competent ego focused on continuous bodily control and self-containment, but to mobilise the productive aspect of this encounter which is always already infected with the virus of the Other, I must animate the loving celebration of the foreign body, the constant flickering of the Emersonian “bright foreigner, the foreign self” (Emerson 1984, p. 404) vibrating at a heightened state of vulnerability when the Other doesn’t cling to itself, when the flesh of the Other might, like the grotesque Gargantuan body, erupt and get out of control, or enwrap and envelop me – when the Other’s discharges and secretions might cling to me and pollute me, stain me and besmear me by leaving their fleshy mark. For our discrete, territorialised subjectivity governed by what Horkheimer and Adorno refer to as “[t]he effort to hold itself together,” the contact with bodily fluids (of others and even one’s own) is often marked with a fear of contamination epitomising identity as “[t]he fear of losing the self” (2002, p. 26).⁶ Instead of forcing myself to overcome this fear, I should surrender to my own fragility – vulnerable, trembling and curious; open myself to the contagion I might be scared of, when the lover her/himself is an open wound emanating volatile particles of him/herself which float and make machinic links with particles of me in temporary rivers and pools of sweat, saliva, ejaculate and tears. I must make a machine beyond the productive and sanitising discourse, acknowledge the cross-contamination of blood, milk and urine, even if homoeopathically diluted in the love reservoirs of our alchemically mixed bodily fluids. Remember, however, that they will never make a homogenous solution – the fusion can never be quite complete – it is never devouring or claiming the Other, but rather a liquid and pulsing movement pointing and outstretching itself towards the Other. There are flows and surges agitating me, surging and ebbing in my veins, in a sense of an open boundary – a combination of affirmation and the experience of the impossible.

An alchemical trope (which is obviously another humoural trope) which also becomes massively intensified when linked with the Deleuzean concept is the magical notion of some substances assuming the properties of others, which is characteristic of the discourse of alchemy and pre-scientific medicine: for example, the conviction that eating a lion’s heart would enhance courage; or that eating pigeons would bring love; or a belief that just like “diamonds weaken the toadstone ...,

topaz weakens lust" (Berman, 1981, p. 75); or the link between clear cold water and good eyesight. The connection between organs and elements of the machine (organic and inorganic, human and non-human) changes the quality of both elements on a *molecular* level as it maximises not only how the human organs can affect the world, but also what the other fragments of the assembly can do. In other words, the machine does not only enhance the consumer, but also the consumed: the courageous element in the eating human is strengthened, but at the same time the lion's heart would not be able to affect the world through human courage if it was not a part of this machine created in the act of eating. Get rid of the organising and hierarchising centre (in this case the *harmonia mundis* – the macrocosm/microcosm hierarchy), and the osmotic merger of the annihilating devouring turns into a flickering of surfaces, with many possible lines of flight, investments and the pure joy of interactions and becomings. As bodily fluids become vehicles for this machine – what is the temporary binder? Is it a liquid emissary of those molecular connections with particles of food and the inside of my mouth; a thread stretched towards the Other, or my saliva flowing into and being flown into the watery element in the food morsel? The digestive juices transport and transform the tiny elements of food, enwrapping them and changing their texture in this embrace. My blood changes its thickness and quality, and the now nutritive atoms reach a new level of agency in this flow.

Deleuze and Guattari stress that even in its masochistic productions the BwO is often "full of gaiety, ecstasy, and dance" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 150). It is the opposite of finding oneself – it is always about dismantling the self, but not in a self-destructive way – not by killing oneself – but by opening the body to connections and flows that draw new planes. For some reason, my intuitive grasp of "dismantling the self" is a pervasively fluid sensation of surrendering to being devoured, yet not consumed, and to the liquidations of the internal structure of the organism, all imbued with the poetics of ecstatically disruptive fluidity:

They open wide their mouth at me,
As a ravening and a roaring lion.

I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.⁷

(The Bible, Psalm 22:12,)

The BwO is produced when we lodge ourselves on a stratum and experiment with the opportunities it offers, when we find potential movements of deterritorialisation and produce flow conjunctions. Concepts, according to Deleuze and Guattari, should create zones of intensity and transform and mobilise thinking (1994, p. 20): "The questions is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?" (Masumi, 2003, p. xv). As Deleuzean readings should create modes of affectivity which open new thought realignments, strange intensities and new conceptual frameworks (Grosz, 1995, p. 126-7), the grounds for the assemblage made by linking the Deleuzean notion of the body and the humoral body should ideally be thematised as experience-producing in a sensory way. My experience of embracing the humoral model is that of being reminded of the excess of life, of the fact that we are more than the finite image of self within skin that we take ourselves to be.

Notes

¹ The humoral model, identified with the dominant physiological paradigm of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, makes sense of the constitution and workings of the human body in terms of its relation to four humours: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. Each of the humours corresponds with a type of personality (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic), an organ (liver, spleen, lungs, gall bladder), and, most importantly, an element in nature (earth, fire, water and air.) ¹ A medieval illustration of the idea can be found in Hildegard von Bingen's "Universal Man" illumination from her *Liber Divinorum Operum* (1165) which beautifully depicts a "Cosmic Wheel" with the osmotic connections between orbis interior and orbis exterior, the human microcosm and the universal macrocosm. On the humours, see, for instance, Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*; Nancy G. Sirasi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*; *Medicine in Seventeenth Century England*, ed. Allen G. Debus.

² The grotesque body was described by Mikhail Bakhtin in his discussion of Francois Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, in which he analyses the images of medieval bodily grotesque in Rabelais in relation to its socio-political and psychological contexts of the specifically modern

conflicts between the interior and the exterior, privacy and openness, self-containment and exchange. See: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. For the link between the humoural and grotesque body, see: Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*.

³ See: Leon S. Roudiez, "Translator's Note" in Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. viii. A similar concept is proposed by Paul Valéry in his notion of *moi pure* - the clear and internalised self, which comes into being as a result of negating all the external contents of the self. See: Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 245-246.

⁴ Bakhtin juxtaposes the grotesque body with what he calls the classical body, embodied by a classical statue, which, devoid of openings or protuberances, keeps its distance, doesn't blur with the world and doesn't secrete any substances.

⁵ There is a rich tradition of the revaluation of bodily fluidity in feminist writings – starting from the Cixousian (non)definition of *l'écriture féminine* and Luce Irigaray's fluid mechanics, through the exploration of the fluid imagery and experience in the writings of, i.e., Iris Marion Young, Elizabeth Grosz, Toril Moi, and Rosi Braidotti, to the elevation of bodily fluids in queer studies where they become one of the most crucial tropes (see, for example, the writings of Leo Bersani, Judith Halberstam, Tim Dean, Linda Williams, or Calvin Thomas. It is also worth mentioning here that the affirmative logic of the (sometimes unreflective) appropriation of abjection has become a visible trend in critical theory as well as film and art theory. The phenomenon of the so called "abject criticism" has been critically described by Winfred Menninghaus, Deborah C. Covino, and Rosalind Krauss,

⁶ In the passage from which these quotations were extracted, Horkheimer and Adorno juxtapose the need for self-integrity with its opposition – a temptation to suspend one's boundaries and let the ego disperse, which is often portrayed as the negative reflection of modernity, or its other "dark side" manifesting itself, for instance, in the Freudian "death drive," or Bataille's notion of "inner experience."

⁷ Stallybrass, P. and White, A., *The Amplified Parallel Bible* (2006), p. 668.

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Economies of Fear: Menstrual Blood and Psi as War-Machines in 1970s Horror

Maria Parsons

The menstrual body has both culturally and historically been located as one of consternation and conflict. No more so is this evident than in the horror genre and particularly in the 1960s and 1970s conflation of Christian and militaristic anxieties with the menstrual young girl and the paranormal. A remarkable number of novels and films which centre on manifestations of the paranormal – including psychic abilities, telekinesis and possession – were produced between the late 1960s and 1970s; these include, for example, *The Power* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Carrie* (1976), *The Spell* (1977), *The Initiation of Sarah* (1978), *The Fury* (1978) and *The Medusa Touch* (1978). In this article, I wish to articulate a link between the menstruant, the paranormal, the State and military concerns. I will argue that the menstruant in horror is an anti-Oedipal war-machine. As Robert Deuchars explains, the war machine is better thought of as 'a politico-philosophical project' or as "a war of becoming over being" (Deuchars, 2011, p. 1). The young menstrual-Psi warriors of 1960s and 1970s horror literature and cinema generate positive lines of flight, activating resistance to gender and capitalist politics. However, in order demonstrate the resistance of the leaky, menstrual body, I will first investigate why the 1970s were ripe for the production of literary and cinematic texts which brought together the connected, yet seemingly disparate strands of feminism, the body, medicine, science, capitalism, the military and Psi research.

Feminism, Capitalism and Psi Research

The relationship between the female body and the State took a seismic technological shift in the 1960s and 1970s. It was the era of Women's Liberation, characterised by events such as the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* in 1970;



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the approval of the contraceptive pill for use in America in 1960; and the first IVF or test-tube baby in 1978. Such socio-cultural and political shifts, alongside technological advances, were changing traditional gender roles and the structure of the Oedipal family unit. As Maria Cancian and Deborah Reed observe, marriage rates have fallen over time with one of “the steepest declines in age-specific marriage percentages occurring between 1970 and 1980 and between 1980 and 1990, with more modest declines after 1990. For example, among women ages 40 to 44, the share married fell from 82 percent in 1970 to 70 percent in 1990 and then to 64 percent in 2006” (2009, p. 22). Unsurprisingly, anxieties pertaining to the family, the female body and reproduction were reflected in horror cinema of the time. The punishment and the abjection of the female body became a mainstay of horror cinema in these decades. For example, this was seen in the treatment of the body of the mother in films such as Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968) which is often read as a reaction to the thalidomide scares of the 1960s (Skal, 1994, pp. 290-291) or in the sheer violence exacted on the female body in films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and the more exploitative *Last House on the Left* (1972) and *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978). It could be argued that these films reflect an attitude or deep-held belief that this generation of young women who were now claiming personal, sexual and political freedoms and equalities outside of the domestic sphere somehow deserved to be punished.

What also becomes increasingly clear in the 1970s is the link between disintegrating Oedipal models of the family, Oedipal desire and capitalist production. As Tamsin Lorraine argues, “‘Oedipalisation’ is a contemporary form of social repression which reduces the forms that desire takes – and thus the connections that desire makes – to those that sustain the social formation of capitalism” (2010, p. 189). If the reproductive body is a bio-political construct of capitalist, Oedipal production, it can therefore be argued that the menstruant is anti-capitalist. As Emily Martin writes, “menstruation not only carries with it the connotation of a productive system that has failed to produce, it also carries the idea of production gone awry, making products of no use, not to specification, unsalable, wasted scrap” (1997, p. 29).

Alongside the oil crisis of 1973 and the collapse of the international gold standard, the US military found itself in a difficult position in the 1970s as technological advances which had secured strategic

success for the Allied Forces in the Second World War saw a reversal of fortunes. Xu Jin argues that the development of “anti-tank and anti-aircraft weaponry after World War II significantly decreased the superiority of offensive weaponry, restoring the ODB [offence/defence balance]. Unable to gain a clear technological advantage, the United States and the Soviet Union sought to strengthen their respective positions by stockpiling armaments and firepower” (p. 186). Moreover, in relation to Cold War politics he points out that “in order to compensate for NATO’s inferiority in Europe, the United States upheld a ruthless strategy of attrition” (p. 186). As a direct result of such policies the 1970s saw the Warsaw Pact countries gain an advantage in terms of firepower and, ‘had they elected to conduct a large-scale armored assault, NATO would simply not have been able to hold them off’ (Xu Jin, 186). He goes on to make the point, that although “America’s failure in Europe was entirely theoretical ... its failure in Vietnam was very real” (p. 187). It was this type of military anxiety and competition that propelled another aspect of Cold War politics, the Space Race, which saw the Russians launch the first satellite, *Sputnik 1*, into space in 1957, followed by America’s symbolically and technologically significant achievement of putting the first man on the moon in 1969. Again the Russian’s took the lead in 1971 when they launched the first space station. It was not until 1975 that Space Race tensions eased when both the US and the Russians jointly collaborated on the Apollo-Soyuz Test project.

If the above can be termed the outer stratum or public face of 1970s politics, economics and the military, I would now like to proffer what I will argue is the covert “epi” or para-stratum of the State machinic-apparatus. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari note, alongside Imperial or State science there coexists what they term “Nomad” or “Minor Science”: “[it] would seem that a whole nomad science develops eccentrically, one that is very different from the royal or imperial sciences” (2004a, p. 399). Furthermore, “this nomad science is continually ‘barred,’ or inhibited, or banned by the demands and condition of State science” (2004a, p. 399). They argue that “if it opposes vague essences and the operative geometry of the trait, it does so not because the content of these sciences is inexact or imperfect, or because of their magic or initiatory character, but because they imply a division of labour opposed to the norms of the state” (2004a, p. 406). As such, research into parapsychology as a military weapon was covertly being carried on alongside more traditional and metric models of scientific investigation.

The high level of mutual suspicion between America and Russia was significant in Cold War politics from the 1950s onwards. This mistrust resulted in an intensification of operations by the intelligence services on both sides and the obscure field of parapsychology in espionage received a significant injection of funding as a result. The explosion of interest in the possibilities of parapsychology for military intelligence came about after a series of inaccurate information leaks, the first being an article in a French newspaper in 1959 which reported a successful remote telepathic card-guessing experiment between an American research institution in Maryland and one of its submarines, *The Nautilus*. The Soviets were shocked by America's lead and in response increased their efforts into the military applicability of psychic research (Kripal, 319).

In a similar chain of events at a conference in Moscow in 1968, American scientists were deliberately confronted with film footage of Soviet successes in psychic research. As Elmer R. Gruber writes in *Psychic Wars*:

They were shown the exciting experiments in psychokinesis conducted by Nina Kulagina, and even permitted to 'smuggle' a copy of the film to the west. The Russian parapsychologist Eduard Naumov reported to the conference that the Red Army had successfully 'repeated' the Nautilus experiments. These and many even less verifiable – and therefore all the more spectacular stories were collected in a book by Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder, and the book, in turn, set off nervous reactions among Americans about the psi advances of the Soviets. (1999, p. 21)

Similarly, W. Adam Mandelbaum notes:

The intelligence services were concerned about a psychic gap between the United States and the Soviet Bloc. CIA reports warned of Russian dominance in the field, and books like *Psychic Discoveries behind the Iron Curtain* were telling tales of super psychics, psychotronic weapons, and other science-fiction-sounding wonders in the Warsaw Pact world. (2000, p. 126)

Published in 1970, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* carried reviews which fed the frenzy for information about the link between military intelligence and the use of psychic abilities for espionage. Above the book's title ran a review from the *Los Angeles Times* which stated "The most important book about ESP research and the validity of the occult tradition yet to appear" (Freedland, 1970).

In 1972, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) responded by founding the Psi research programme at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to investigate the possibilities of Psi for military purposes. The programme was set to last for 23 years. The subject under study was not whether Psi existed or not but rather how it could be used in intelligence operations to penetrate the Iron Curtain. The secrecy surrounding these experiments undoubtedly contributed to the overall mythologisation of military psychic spying. As Mandelbaum notes of SRI:

The research at SRI was not the first time that the government spent money on psychic research to determine its utility as a military and espionage tool. It was, however the most sustained effort by the United States to incorporate psychic spying in its arsenal of intelligence collection techniques. The research was to continue, and other laboratories were to make their contributions in the field of remote-viewing research, but it all started in Menlo Park, California at SRI. (2000, p. 126)

At the same time as research into remote viewing was being conducted, the military and government also created ARPA (Advanced Research Project Agency) in 1958, which became known as DARPA in 1972 (Defense Advanced Research Project Agency). This was initially a Cold War response to Russian advances in space technology and the launch of Sputnik 1. However, its remit soon expanded to include research into early internet development and military weaponry advances which included the stealth fighter and M16 assault rifle. As one DARPA publication states, its

primary mission is to foster advanced technologies and systems that create 'revolutionary' advantages for the U.S. military. ... DARPA program managers are encouraged to challenge existing approaches and to seek results rather than just

explore ideas. Hence, in addition to supporting technology and component development, DARPA has funded the integration of large-scale 'systems of systems' in order to demonstrate what we call today 'disruptive capabilities'. (Van Atta, 2008, p. 20)

Even if DARPA is again a more public front to the US government's military research, it is its "disruptive capabilities" that underpin the relationship between Imperial or State Science and nomadic science. Given the cultural sensibility of the 1970s, it seems unsurprising that yet another para-scientific institute was founded by astronaut Edgar J. Mitchell in 1973 to investigate what he considered to be the next frontier: human consciousness itself. The Noetics Institute, as it was called, is still operational today.

The conflation of the concepts outlined thus far – that is, the relationship between feminism, the State, capitalism and its para/psi military – becomes especially apparent in considering the militaristic approach to the body of the young menstrual girl in horror in the 1970s. The most infamous menstrual horror texts of the 1970s are William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971), Stephen King's ubiquitous high school narrative *Carrie* (1974) and John Farris' *The Fury* (1976). Each of these novels was further adapted for the screen: *The Exorcist*, directed by William Friedkin in 1973, and both *Carrie* and *The Fury*, directed by Brian de Palma in 1976 and 1978 respectively.

The Exorcist tells the story of Regan MacNeil, a twelve-year-old girl who is possessed by a demon who calls himself Captain Howdy, an ancient evil also known as Pazuzu. With the release of Friedkin's film in the US on 26 December 1973, it was the first time in mainstream cinema that audiences were assailed with the desecration of the home, the family, the church and, perhaps most shockingly, the child (Kermode, 1999, p. 9). The young all-American girl Regan MacNeil, played by Linda Blair, becomes a depraved monster who urinates on the carpet of her home, vomits on the clergy, batters and humiliates her mother (actress Ellen Burstyn), spouts tirades of obscenities and blasphemes religious artifacts.

Carrie, Stephen King's first published novel and the book that launched his career, tells the story of a high school girl called Carrie White, the daughter of a religiously fanatical mother. A social outcast at

school because of her strange beliefs and dowdy clothes, she is the target of constant bullying by her classmates. However, she also possesses mild telekinetic powers which powerfully re-emerge with the onset of menstruation. Carrie's alienation and victimisation culminates with her using her powers to destroy her fellow students at her high school prom, wreaking havoc on the town on her way home, and lastly murdering her mother. The film version was released in 1976, directed by Brian de Palma and starring Sissy Spacek as Carrie, Piper Laurie as her fanatical mother and Amy Irving as her classmate Susan Snell.

Finally, John Farris' *The Fury*, published in 1976, is a novel of assassins, psychic twins and military black operations. Peter Sandza's psychic son Robin has been abducted by a secret military organisation named MORG (an acronym for Multiphastic Operations Research Group), which conducts experiments towards the use of psychic powers as a weapon in warfare. As Peter searches for his son he discovers Gillian Belaver, Robin's psychic twin, who is also under threat of abduction by this covert military organisation. *The Fury* was adapted for the screen in 1978, again directed by Brian DePalma, with the screenplay written by Farris. Kirk Douglas starred in the film as the renegade father in search of his son, with central character Gillian played by Amy Irving who also appeared in DePalma's *Carrie*. Since the publication of the novel and the film's release, Farris has followed up with three sequels to the original novel: *The Fury and the Terror* (1999), *The Fury and the Power* (2003) and *Avenging Fury* (2008).

Not coincidentally, these menstrual horror texts demonstrate a female bio-politics that is negotiated on the edges of the relationship between the female body and fringe science (Psi), where gender politics, Oedipal desire and capitalism are militarised. I will first argue that the Psi-menstruant in horror is a war-machine external to the State. With the onset of menstrual and Psi "affects", the young protagonists of these texts find themselves in a schizo-anarchic conflict with the State and its Paternalistic Laws of the Father(s) and thus their synthetic or secondary menstrual objective becomes war. The menstruant's weapons are projectiles – blood, vomit, telekinesis and psychokinetic affects are extraneously emitted and irrupted. It is at this point of menstrual-morphosis and menstrual/psi irruption that the State appropriates the body of the young girl, compelling her disruptive, leaky body to conform to State's paternal authority.

Menstrual-Morphosis and the Menstrual/Psi War-Machine in 1970s Horror

As Paul Patton explains, the War Machine “has little to do with actual war”; instead, “the real object of Deleuze and Guattari’s war-machine concept is not war but the conditions of mutation and change” (1984, p. 110). Most importantly, the war-machine is exterior to the State apparatus; in contrast to the army or military, it “is of another species, another nature, another origin than the State apparatus” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b, p. 350). The war machine is nomadic, molecular and rhizomic where war is not its primary goal. For example, Deleuze and Guattari make the point that the avant-garde or similar creative movements have artistic production as their primary aim and their disruptive resistance to the State as secondary. It is not until the State appropriates the war machine that it changes in nature and function. They argue that “it is at one and the same time that the State apparatus appropriates a war machine, that the war machine takes war as its object, and that war becomes subordinated to the aims of the State” (2004a, p. 461).

The first objective of the menstrual war-machine is menstruation. “The menstrual body as war-machine is a ‘hydraulic’ model of ‘becoming’, a menstrual-morphosis”. As Mary Douglas notes, menstrual blood is a viscous substance “half-way between solid and liquid. It is like a cross-section in a process of change” (2005, p. 38). In *The Exorcist*, *Carrie* and *The Fury*, the bodies of the young female protagonists Regan, Carrie and Gillian, aged 12, 16, and 14 respectively, are in the throes of menstruation and puberty. Although Regan is never directly referred to as menstrual, she is the ultimate oozing, leaky body as she publicly urinates, vomits green bile and bloodily masturbates with a crucifix. Carrie is the public menstruant who is told to “plug it up” and Gillian is the teenager who makes menstrual those with whom she comes into contact. Menstrual-morphosis is also a “becoming-woman” and, as becomings can only be minoritarian, that involves a move away from normative phallogocentric positions of power. Moreover, the girl occupies a unique position in relation to “becoming”. The girl is a threshold: she

is neither a representation nor the starting point for becoming-(a)-woman. Rather, the girl is the force of desire that breaks off particles from the molar compositions that constitute us as women and men, young and old, heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual,

creating lines of rampant propagation and contagion [and a] diversity of conjugated becomings. (Sotirin, 2005, p. 108)

As Deleuze and Guattari write of the war machine, "rather than being a theory of solids treating fluids as a special case; ancient atomism is inseparable from flows, and flux is reality itself, or consistency" (2004a, p. 398). They continue noting that the model in question is one of "becoming and heterogeneity, as opposed to the stable, the eternal, the identical, the constant" (2004a, p. 398). They point out that the "*problemata* are the war machine itself and are inseparable from inclined planes, passages to the limit, vortices, and projections. It would seem that the war machine is projected into an abstract knowledge formally different from the one that doubles the State apparatus" (2004a, p. 399). Moreover, this vortical model "operates in an open space throughout which things-flows are distributed, rather than plotting out a closed space for linear and solid things" (2004a, p. 399). Thus, menstrual-becoming or menstrual-morphosis involves what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "deformations, transmutations, passages to the limit, operations in which each figure describes an 'event' much more than an essence; ... the problem is affective and is inseparable from the metamorphoses, generations and creations within science" (2004a, p. 399).

As I have already pointed out, menstruation in 1970s horror is conflated with the para-scientific or the paranormal. Therefore, I would argue that Psi phenomena in these texts are menstrual affects linking what Deleuze and Guattari distinguish as the difference between noology and corporeality (*zoe*), and epistemology and the body (*bios*) – that is, the difference between nomadic science and Imperial or State science. The noological, menstrual body as war machine can be understood to be itinerant, schizoid and of nomadic science, whereas the striated menstrual body is instead coded and appropriated by the apparatuses of the State-machine.

Schizo-Anarchy and the Menstrual War-Machine: Our Father(s) Deliver Us from Evil

Political sovereignty – or the State, as Deleuze and Guattari argue – has two heads: the magician king and the jurist priest (2004a, p. 388). Although, these two forms of State control are oppositional, they operate as a sovereign unity. It is for this reason that the *The Exorcist*, *Carrie* and *The Fury* are

populated by father figures of paternalistic Law and cultural prohibition. The Church (Jurist Priests) and the military (despotic Magician Kings) operate not as binary distinctions but instead function in order to secure, contain, then occupy and territorialise the leaky border of menstruation, a *terrain vague* of intense, fluid *event-affect*. These paternal law keepers intervene to curtail the schizo-anarchic menstruants of Regan, Carrie and Gillian who, in a secondary or synthetic flow, are in anti-Oedipal conflict or collision with the State.

The menstruants in these novels and films are set against a changing socio-political and cultural landscape. *The Exorcist* suggests the breakdown of the family, the lack of respect for religious traditions, the destruction of the home, all issues that were deeply troubling the conservative element of America, a world described by the police detective Kinderman in the novel as “having a massive nervous breakdown” (Blatty, 1998, p. 132). Stephen King describes the 1960s and 1970s in a similar manner, arguing that the gap between parents and children was more than generational. Instead, he writes, the “two generations seemed, like the San Andreas Fault, to be moving along opposing plates of social and cultural conscience, commitment, and definitions of civilized behaviour itself. The result was not so much an earthquake as it was a timequake” (1993, p. 167). Moreover, he describes *The Exorcist*, both the novel and film, as finely honed focusing points “for that entire youth explosion that took place in the late sixties and early seventies” (1993, pp. 196–7) and links his composition of *Carrie* to emerging feminist politics: “writing the book in 1973 and only out of college three years, I was fully aware of what Women’s Liberation implied for me and others of my sex. The book is, in its more adult implications, an uneasy masculine shrinking from a future of female equality” (1993, p. 170).

Contiguous with the novels of King and Blatty, Farris’ novel presents the reader with a rhizomatic, decentralised socio-political and cultural backdrop. Pointing explicitly to the breakdown and dissolution of social ideologies and practices and the subsequent disorientation and dislocation of young people – Avery Bellaver, Gillian’s father and the novel’s resident anthropologist – describes the world as one where

taboo is breaking down and family groups are fragmented, acceptance and approval are concentrated in highly structured peer-groups where the rules are constantly

changing, dictated by fashion, by the, ah, soul-destroying perversities of our merchandisers. ... Eventually emotional seams give way and our shamans appear unequal to the task of integrating the frail and the fallen into what is, essentially, a societal madhouse. (Farris, 1978, pp. 12-13)

The breaking down of taboo, family units and consumerism all contribute to chaos as emotional stitches begin to unravel.

This schizophrenic nature of society further reflects a conflict between capitalist production and Oedipal structures of desire. For both Freud and Lacan desire is predicated on lack. Conversely for Deleuze and Guattari the schizoid is incapable of experiencing lack; instead desire produces the real and creates new worlds and possibilities. The Deleuzio-Guattarian schizoid scrambles and decodes the Oedipal signifying chain. For Deleuze and Guattari schizophrenia is:

the exterior limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limitHence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death. (2004b, p. 267)

Or, as Jonah Peretti notes: "As capitalism decodes and deterritorializes it reaches a limit at which point it must artificially reterritorialize by augmenting the state apparatus, and repressive bureaucratic and symbolic regimes" (1984). He further states that "Deleuze and Guattari see the schizophrenic as capitalism's exterminating angel. For them the schizo is a radical, revolutionary, nomadic wanderer who resists all forms of oppressive power" (1984).

Regan, Carrie and Gillian can be described as schizoid, menstrual Psi-warriors. Their bodies are matter and event-affect. Demonic possession, telekinesis and telepathy are the explicit outward expression of the menstrual war-machine. The demon possessing Regan's body is multiple. He refers to himself when asked as "Nowonmai" a phonetic anagram of "I am no one" (also of "no one me", "no one may",

"I am now on", or "I am not one"). The demon is legion, suggesting the Biblical exorcism of the possessed man at Gadara. According to the Gospel of St Luke, upon meeting the man, "Jesus asked him, saying what is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him" (8:30). What is presented is a legion of voices or subjects and what is expressed by the demon through the possessed body of Regan is a schizophrenic appraisal of numerous anxieties which plague the central adult characters. There is no centralised subject or "I". The possessed Regan comments on her mother's relationship with the movie director Burke Denning; insults the inadequacies of the medical profession; and needles the guilt and crisis of faith plaguing the Church as it is personified in the character of Fr. Karras.

In *Carrie*, although King's narrative centres upon the misfit and misunderstood student Carrie White, four other female characters stand out strongly and present disturbing images of femininity: her mother Margaret White, her gym teacher Miss Desjardin (renamed Miss Collins in DePalma's film) and her classmates, Susan Snell and Chris Hargenson. Mrs White is the sexually repressed, fundamentalist zealot who seeks atonement through the body of Carrie; Miss Desjardin the concerned teacher who seeks to socialise her; Sue Snell the pretty, popular girl who seeks to allay her own feelings of guilt through Carrie; and finally Chris, the rich kid, spoilt and angry, who needs a scapegoat in order to alleviate her own anxieties about her femininity and sexuality. Thus, it is possible to read Carrie as the extreme embodiment of the anxieties of her mother, Miss Desjardin, Sue and Chris pertaining to what constitutes femininity and their individual identity as women. In an apocalyptic, pyrokinetic final sequence, having fallen victim to the horror of high school conformity and banality, Carrie locks her peers inside the school's gymnasium and burns down the hall at her prom before continuing to wreak havoc on the town itself, which offers an equally depressing female future of diet pills and the Parent Teacher Association.

Farris' Gillian also embodies the contemporary anxieties of her peers. In *The Fury* he also equates menstruation and female puberty with what he describes as a morbid crisis of startling personality changes, nervous breakdowns and anti-Oedipal desires. In describing Gillian's peers, most of whom have turned fifteen, he notes that one has had 'a bona fide nervous breakdown' and another, having

discovered sex, “was carrying on a precocious affair with a twenty-three year old seminarian at General Theological” (Farris, 1978, p. 11).

It is against this schizoid socio-cultural backdrop of menstrual paranormal girls that Jurist Priests intervene to reinstate Oedipal, paternal law. As Deleuze and Guattari write,

the State has at its disposal a violence that is not channelled through war – either it uses police officers and jailers in place of warriors, has no arms and no need of them, operates by immediate, magical capture, “seizes” and “binds” preventing all combat – or, the State acquires an army, but in a way that presupposes a juridical integration of war and the organisation of a military function. (2004a, p. 388)

Thus, the menstrual-warriors or menstrual war-machine protagonists of King, Blatty and Farris are “in the position of betraying everything, including the function of the military” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a, p. 388). Here I wish again to make the point that menstruation is an event-affect: it is noological or *zoe* rather than *bios*, where *zoe* is understood as an affirmative life force and *bios* as the intervention of sovereign power. The menstrual war-machine suggests the potential for transformation and change on both a molecular and corporeal level, whereas the State apparatuses of medicine, the family, education, the military and the Church all seek to striate and code the body of the young girl in these texts. This is especially evident in the militaristic function of both literal and figurative priests as Christian crusaders and Paternal Law keepers who intervene to curtail the menstrual anti-Oedipal disruptions of Regan, Carrie and Gillian.

Common to each of these texts is the absence of a father figure which causes a disruption to the Oedipal triad of Father/Mother/Child. In *The Exorcist*, Chris MacNeil is in the process of divorcing her husband who is absent throughout both the novel and film. The father figure in *Carrie* is dead and it is explicitly stated in *The Fury* that Gillian’s anthropologist father is frequently away for months at a time working. The absent father disrupts the operation of desire in these texts. As I have already noted in the previous section, the schizoid aspects of these young, pubescent, menstrual girls, create the possibility for disruption and change to Western social and economic structures of capitalist desire and

consumption. As this is the underlying fear of orthodox, majoritarian discourses and apparatuses, the disrupted territory of the Oedipal family triad must be reinstated. A replacement father figure is imperative to the project of reterritorialising these menstruous bodies. The substitute father figure in these texts is religious: an actual priest (*The Exorcist*), a performative priest (*The Fury*) or an image/icon of Christ, the ultimate priest figure (*Carrie*).

According to Deleuze and Guattari the priest is one of the most insidious obstructers of desire and deterritorialisation. They argue that: Every time desire is betrayed, cursed, uprooted from its field of immanence, a priest is behind it. The priest cast the triple curse on desire: the negative law, the extrinsic rule, and the transcendent ideal. (2004a, p. 154)

They go on to point out that the 'most recent figure of the priest is the psychoanalyst, with his or her three principles: Pleasure, Death, and Reality (2004a, pp. 154–5). Furthermore, they draw attention to the curtailment and control of desire in Western culture which has been religiously extended through a philosophy based on lack and castration anxiety, desire as pleasure through discharge (masturbation) and desire as impossibility (phantasy).

It has been critically observed that in *The Exorcist*, Regan's possession coincides with paternal rejection as well as menstruation and puberty, and occurs after she overhears a phone conversation between her mother and her father who has forgotten her birthday. From this point onwards in the narrative, a precocious sexuality emerges in Regan and her use of language becomes decidedly crude and sexualised. It is also suggested that Regan is responsible for a series of desecrations in a local church: human excrement is left on the altar, a massive phallus is sculpted in clay and glued to a statue of Christ, and a text (written in Latin) is discovered, detailing "an imagined homosexual encounter involving the Blessed Virgin and Mary Magdalene" (Blatty, 1998, p. 193). These desecrations can be read as deliberate disruptions to the Oedipal holy family. Alongside Regan's sexual precociousness, desire is deterritorialised and liberated from images and signifiers of the incest taboo. Gender and sexuality are destratified and a schizophrenic polymorphic sexuality replaces heterosexual normativity.

Perhaps the most controversial scene in both the novel and film is Regan's masturbation with a crucifix. The antithetical alignment of the genitalia and the crucifix initially can be read as blasphemous, but, if read in terms of Deleuze and Guattari, it is perhaps the most positively challenging and transgressive scene in both the novel and film. Desire as controlled and inscribed by religion and the Oedipal paradigm merge and intersect until it is unclear as to whether what is happening is an act of pleasure or masochism. Lack/castration, pleasure/pain and fantasy, collapse into a "fuzzy aggregate" a decoding of strata, and a deterritorialization of desire. Blatty describes the scene as follows:

Regan, her legs propped up and spread wide on a bed that was violently bouncing and shaking, clutched the bone-white crucifix in raw-knuckled hands, the bone-white crucifix poised at her vagina ... 'Yes you're going to let Jesus *fuck* you, *fuck* you, f__' Regan now, eyes wide and staring, flinching from the rush of some hideous finality, mouth agape shrieking at the dread of some ending. The abruptly the demonic face once more possessed her, now filled her, the room choking suddenly with a stench in the nostrils, with an icy cold that seeped from the walls as the rappings ended and Regan's piercing cry of terror turned to a guttural, yelping laugh of malevolent spite and rage triumphant while she thrust down down the crucifix into her vagina and began to masturbate ferociously, roaring in that deep, coarse, deafening voice, 'Now you're *mine*, now you're *mine*, you stinking cow! You bitch! Let Jesus *fuck* you, *fuck* you!' (1998, p. 182-3)

This scene further disrupts the Oedipal triad of desire and the law of the father with references to a menstrual, poly-gendered, poly-sexual Regan, intimating a complete break with the incest taboo. This taboo is further ruptured when the possessed Regan clutches her mother's hair and "yanked her face hard against her vagina, smearing it with blood while she frantically undulated her pelvis. 'Aahhh, little pig mother!' Regan crooned with a guttural, rasping, throaty eroticism. 'Lick me, lick me! Aahhhhhh!'" (Blatty, 1998, p.183).

A reinstatement of Oedipal law is achieved by replacing the absent father with another kind of father – a priest, who in turn is both assisted and replaced by the ultimate theological father figure of Christ/God. It is through the ritual of exorcism that Regan is reappropriated back into the familial fold. It encapsulates in all its forms the Deleuzio-Guattarian philosophy of ‘reterritorialisation’. Through the ritual of exorcism and the invocation of Christ, who, along with the Virgin Mary, is one of the most profoundly determined, striated and religiously inscribed bodies in Western culture, the menstruous-monstrous body of Regan is recoded. The words “the body of Christ compels you” are repeated incessantly throughout her exorcism: she is literally compelled and coerced by the body of Christ to restructify and reterritorialise.

The Oedipal reterritorialisation of Regan as menstrual war-machine is also reflective of anxieties concerning the dissipation of faith and religion in the 1960s and 1970s. The sixties saw a growing interest in Eastern religions and esoteric philosophies which greatly undermined the hitherto centralised control and influence of the Catholic Church. The modernisation and rebranding of Catholicism began in earnest with the Vatican II Council between 1962 and 1965. A further indication of how far people had begun to move away from organized religion and spiritual faith is evident in an address of Pope Paul VI to a general audience in November 1972, entitled “Confronting the Devil’s Power”, which opened with the statement that “one of the Church’s greatest needs is to be defended against the evil we call the Devil.” He further proclaimed that by leaving oneself open to “licentious sensual experiences and to harmful drugs, as well as to the ideological seductions of fashionable errors,” one was allowing cracks through which the Devil could enter. In conclusion he rallied that the “Christian must be a militant” giving both “meaning and, effectiveness to the familiar invocation in our principal prayer: ‘Our Father... deliver us from evil!’” This further demonstrates Catholicism’s attempt to reassert itself in a changing environment which had more or less rendered it obsolete in the lives of ordinary people. Both the novel and the film are permeated with this crisis of faith. The figure of Fr. Karras, a priest who has lost his faith and can also be said to be “fatherless” (that is, Godless) regains his religious belief through the exorcism of Regan. Chris MacNeil, the atheist mother, also has her faith renewed. Overall, what *The Exorcist* ultimately achieves is a reterritorialisation of rhizomatic socio-cultural and sexual lines of flight. In a faithless, fragmented, schizophrenic culture, Oedipal law is reinscribed. The horror lies not in the monstrous, grotesque, menstrual body of Regan or in her

possession as traditional structuralist readings of signifier and signified would suggest but, rather, in her "redemption/exorcism" and the reinscription and re-embodiment of rooted phallocentric desire and control through a reassertion of the following triad – lack/castration, masturbatory pleasure and desire as phantasy. Potentially positive lines of flight and deterritorialisations are reterritorialised and locked back into highly striated packages. The body, puberty, female sexuality, political agitation and change are all reconfigured in the exorcised Regan MacNeil. She has moved from menstrual war-machine, a becoming-woman, to becomes-monster, and is finally reconfigured as a socialised embodiment of femininity and traditional gender roles.

In *Carrie*, the father figure is dead, once again disrupting the Oedipal triad of desire. Carrie's mother, the fundamentalist zealot Margaret White, reconstructs this broken trinity by substituting the absent father with the figure of Christ. Religious iconography dominates the White household, but the ultimate item of religious paraphernalia in the White family home is a towering four foot high plaster crucifix, "a corpus" that has given Carrie endless nightmares. The White family is merely a simulacra of the Oedipal nuclear family, which perhaps provides the reason for both Carrie and her mother's ultimate death: the imaginary nuclear family is unable to sustain the polymorphic, sexual transgression of Carrie's becoming-woman, becoming menstrual-Psi-war-machine. Carrie is essentially captured within a Deleuzio-Guattarian catastrophic black-hole which swallows her up. This is perhaps also a warning to women's liberation and the changes it was affecting in relation to sexuality and the traditional family unit. Thus King's novel reinforces a traditional family politics.

Less explicit is the figure of the priest in *The Fury* who features in a performative capacity. Like her counterparts Regan and Carrie, Gillian inhabits a disrupted nuclear family circuit with a father who spends a large amount of time away from his family due to his work as an anthropologist. While recovering from a viral infection in hospital she is approached by Peter Sandza, the father of her psychic twin Robin. Peter comes to Gillian dressed in the guise of a priest. Once again, there is a decisive inversion or perversion of the Oedipus complex. With Gillian in a state of panic and anxiety, Peter first strikes her in an effort to calm her down. When this fails to work, he

kissed her instead, tenderly and with as much lust as he thought she might be familiar with at her age. Gillian found this new approach confusing, shocking and indefensible, and as she grew slack in his arms gradually the kiss became a comfort to her. With his own eyes closed Peter readily lost awareness of her youth; the snug pressure of her uncovered cunt against his body was mature enough, even insinuating. (Farris, 1978, pp. 124-5)

Peter is further described as

Grotesquely ambivalent toward this unusual girl, as if he'd just given birth to her, as if they were already lovers. He was in the worst possible danger, or he would've taken her with him ... and Peter knew Gillian would accompany him without question. He had saved her from the fury and the terror, and in a sense he owned her now. (1978, p. 125)

As Gillian comes to her senses and gains awareness, Peter explains that he is not a priest and that he is just wearing "a lousy disguise". A substitute father, he saves Gillian from madness in the guise of a priest; moreover, this father figure is the *actual* father of Robin. This establishes another unholy trinity or perverse Oedipal triad – Gillian, Peter and Robin. Such transgressions of the incest taboo are continuously intimated throughout the novel.

However, in *The Fury* it is State/Government intervention which ultimately restratifies and recodes the body of Gillian as menstrual war-machine and reinstates the nuclear, Oedipal family unit. The interference of the covert military agency MORG is a deliberate strategy to maintain the capitalist machine, and this is again connected to the Oedipal paradigms of desire and capitalist production. Thus, the psychic abilities of the two main protagonists Gillian and Robin are captured, analysed and researched by the military for the productive use in espionage and total war. Published at the height of experimentation in the field, Farris's novel exploits fears of communism, nuclear war and the dangers of using the human mind as a military weapon. The agency MORG and the Paragon Institute are

fictional representations of the CIA and the psychic research programme undertaken at the Stanford Research Institute. Headed by a man named Childermass, Farris writes:

He conned large numbers of otherwise sensible men into believing that the CIA and FBI weren't enough. We needed MORG. And did we ever get it. ... 'You didn't know Childermass was interested in psychic phenomena'. 'No. The Russians and Czechs had been diddling with it for years, reason enough for Childermass to sink a few million into Paragon Institute. Nothing much had come of his investments. But it was all there, just waiting, for Robin.' ... Childermass found himself in the possession of a unique natural resource. The Russians don't have one. The Chinese don't have one. He wanted Robin locked up – the euphemism is 'involuntary sequestration' – where his researchers could devote full time to him. (Farris, 1978, p. 102)

Childermass can also be read as a characterisation of the actual scientists who were employed to conduct the psychic research at SRI. The first person to head the research programme was a Dr Harold Puthoff who had previously served in Naval Intelligence and as a civilian at the National Security Agency. Other notable characters are the psychic spies Ed Dames, Lyn Buchanan, David Morehouse, Joseph McMoneagle, General Stubblebine and Ingo Swann. Thus Robin and Gillian are further fictionalised characterisations of so-called “psychic spies” employed by the US military from the 1960s until the mid-1990s.

In contemporary culture the military's appropriation of 'war machine-philosophy' has for the time-being replaced the emphasis on psychic spies or Psi-weaponry. For example in relation to the Israeli-Palestine conflict, Shimon Naveh, a retired Brigadier General who directs the Operational Theory Research Institute founded in 1996 which trains staff officers from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and other militaries in operational theory, states: “We are like the Jesuit Order. We attempt to teach and train soldiers to think” (Weizman). Again this echoes the intervention of the Catholic Church in *The Exorcist* and the fanatical tirades of Carrie White's mother in King's novel *Carrie*. Furthermore, it draws a connection between military motivation and the fervour of the Christian crusader. This was echoed

throughout the 1990s and the 2000s during the Bush administration and also in the presidential campaigns of John McCain and Sarah Palin, whereby, military, familial and religious discourse became inseparable and interchangeable. Eyal Weizman notes the intensity of the use of postmodern theory in teaching at the Research Institute:

In a lecture Naveh showed a diagram resembling a 'square of opposition' that plots a set of logical relationships between certain propositions referring to military and guerrilla operations. Labelled with phrases such as 'Difference and Repetition – The Dialectics of Structuring and Structure', 'Formless Rival Entities', 'Fractal Manoeuvre', 'Velocity vs. Rhythms', 'The Wahabi War Machine', 'Postmodern Anarchists' and 'Nomadic Terrorists', they often reference the work of Deleuze and Guattari. War machines, according to the philosophers, are polymorphous; diffuse organizations characterized by their capacity for metamorphosis, made up of small groups that split up or merge with one another, depending on contingency and circumstances. (Deleuze and Guattari were aware that the state can willingly transform itself into a war machine. Similarly, in their discussion of 'smooth space' it is implied that this conception may lead to domination.) (Weizman)

Thus the Operational Research Institute of the IDF is, in effect, another version of the SRI or Farris' MORG (institutions that appropriate the nomadic war machine in the form of the State military). Interestingly, investigative work into the subject of psychic spies, written by Jon Ronson and entitled *Men who Stare at Goats* (2004), was also released in 2009 as a feature-length movie starring George Clooney in the central role. What is striking about the timing of the book's publication and the film's release is that they emerge not within a climate of capitalist fears of communism but instead within a new climate of post 9/11 paranoia. This contemporary cultural atmosphere is more notable for its fears of terrorism, jihad and Islam as well as a climate of fear which again can be directly traced to a threat on capitalism. The iconic attack on 11 September 2001 was epitomised by the fall of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre, the epicentre of global capitalism. This leads me into the final section in

which I will briefly comment on more contemporary examples of Psi narratives and the menstrual war-machine both in cinema and in recent television series.

Menstrual War-Machines and Psi:

The Politics of a Neoliberal, Corporate, Reproductive Death Drive

Since 9/11 and the economic crash of 2008, global capitalism has entered into one of its most uncertain phases since the Great Depression of the 1930s. More than ever before, the fluxes and flows of economy as ideology have come to the fore. This shift in economies from the Cold War era to the contemporary has been marked, as Rosi Braidotti notes, by an emphasis on market forces. Here Braidotti points to the continuing role of bio-technologies and the need to account for “the very vital forces that, per definition, escape political control” (2006, p. 38). Moreover, Giorgio Agamben makes the point that there is now a the need to bring to light “the ungovernable, which is the beginning and, at the same time, the vanishing point of every politics” (24). What this means for women and, in particular, the Deleuzo-Guattarian politics of becoming-girl has never been more explicit; the “cunt” or the reproductive capacity of the female body, its link to capitalism and technology and, even more so, its disruptive capabilities with regards to the religious tension between a perceived Christian West and an Islamic East are in stark relief. Nowhere is this more evident than in the recent controversy surrounding the incarceration of feminist punk band Pussy Riot members in Russia. The trial draws to attention the distinction between the war-machine or nomadic warrior and the terrorist. The members of Pussy Riot had to be re-coded as potential terrorists and sentenced on charges of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.

Such cultural anxiety about women, sexuality and war can also be found in recent productions of so-called psychic films which have included a 1999 sequel to *Carrie* entitled *The Rage: Carrie 2* and *X-Men* (now an entire franchise) in 2000; *Project: Human Weapon* (2001) *Firestarter 2* (2002); *The Echo Game* (2009); *Push* (2009); *Chronicle* (2012); and *Looper* (2012). In 2013, another remake of DePalma's *Carrie* was released in the US starring Chloe Moretz. War, the military and capitalism are all evident in such film productions.

The link between the unpredictable, the ungovernable or the leaky female body in recent cinema constitutes what Braidotti describes as the "genetic social imaginary" (2006, p.47). This is seen in the interminable marketing of the next generation of gadgets, phones and cars. It is further pointed out that "another aspect to this phenomenon is the uses of genetics in political debates on race, ethnicity and immigration, as well as public debates ranging from abortion to stem-cell research to new kinship and family structures" (Braidotti, 2007). In cinema, the human or more specifically the woman, genetically or technologically evolves and mutates (for instance, in *X-Men* and *Chronicle*). In politics, the abortion debates continue with scientific advances showing a retrenchment in the availability of abortion simultaneous with an expansion in assisted reproductive technologies. As Braidotti warns, this veritable "explosion of discursive interest in the politics of life itself affects also the question of death and new ways of dying. Bio-power and necro-politics are two sides of the same coin" (Braidotti, 2007).

Recent Psi cinematic productions alongside the release of a number of European horror films indicate a particular form of necro-politics which I determine to be indicative of a contemporary, corporate, reproductive death drive. The neoliberal, hyper-individualisation of health and body management has impacted significantly on the reproductive body. Reproduction is now a capitalist investment outside of the female body. Eggs and sperm are commodities and wombs are rentable. As such, perhaps the Oedipal family unit is no longer the elevated, privileged model of a desiring-capitalist-machine. Indeed, it could be argued that the traditional family no longer suits the neoliberal agenda. Perhaps this is why the family in horror has once again become a dark and dangerous space.

However, the notable difference in contemporary family horror narratives and those of the 1970s as explored in *The Exorcist*, *Carrie* and *The Fury* is that there is no restitution of order or return to equilibrium; the ending provides no relief. In European horror, two notable films which articulate contemporary familial anxieties are Pascale Laugier's *Martyrs* (2008) and the Greek film *Dogtooth* (2009). *Martyrs* belongs to a category of new wave extreme French horror cinema and tells the story of the abduction and escape of a young girl in the 1970s by what is assumed to be a paedophile gang. Traumatized by the events and the torture that she suffered as a child, she is irreparably psychologically damaged. Years later, when her abusers are tracked down, it is revealed that she was actually abducted by a bourgeois group of individuals (a corporation) who are sadistic torturers

hoping to discover what lies beyond the transcendent. *Dogtooth* is a dark horror/comedy of a strange family set-up. The parents have lied to their children in order to keep them confined within the family compound in the Greek countryside. Having had no contact with the outside world, the children are infantilised and their vocabulary is filled with words which do not signify what they should – the vagina is called a piano and the pussy signifies a light switch.

What is notable in both *Dogtooth* and *Martyrs* is the revelation of the family as a dark, incestuous and sadistic space. If contemporary, neoliberal culture views technology and life as capitalist products circulating in a free market economy, then it is a bio-power of death. Families are now dangerous spaces outside of corporate or State control. For example, the cabin in the woods, the bunker, the bomb shelter and the basement are now potentially anti-Oedipal incestuous prisons. Contemporary media constantly assail us with reports of women who have escaped their abductors or who have been discovered by the authorities such as Natascha Kampusch, Jaycee Lee Dugard and Elizabeth who was kept captive for over 24 years by her father Josef Fritzl. These women are abjected from the cultural intelligibility of child birth and sexuality as a result of the perverse circumstances of their rapes and pregnancies. Moreover, Western, middle-class women are being pushed to delay child birth until it becomes necessary to buy the IVF treatments and, if successful, to then rush to “Mothercare” to purchase the latest must-have accoutrements of commercial child-rearing.

However, the one body that continues to defy the corporate, the technological, the capitalist and familial, Oedipal model is the menstruant. In an era when one can outsource child bearing to women in developing countries, the menstrual, non-productive, leaky female body continues to disrupt. The menstrual war-machine is a viscous, mucosal, schizoid, nomadic, smooth vortical space of vital political resistance to the bio-power of the contemporary neoliberal, corporate, war-mongering, reproductive death drive.

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Firestarter 2: Rekindled, 2002. [Film] Directed by Robert Iscove. USA: USA Films, Traveler's Rest Films and USA Cable Network.

The Fury, 1978. [Film] Directed by Brian de Palma. USA: Twentieth Century Fox and Frank Yablans Presentations.

The Initiation of Sarah, 1978. [Film] Directed by Stuart Gillard. USA: Charles Fries Productions and Stonehenge Productions.

I Spit on Your Grave, 1978. [Film] Directed by Meir Zarchi. USA: Cinemagic Pictures

The Last House on the Left, 1972. [Film] Directed by Wes Craven. USA: Lobster Enterprises, Sean S. Cunningham Films and The Night Co.

Martyrs, 2008. [Film] Directed by Pascale Laugier. France: Canal Horizons, CinéCinéma, Eskwad, TCB Film and Wild Bunch.

The Medusa Touch, 1978. [Film] Directed by Jack Gold. UK: Coatesgold and Incorporated Television Company.

Project: Human Weapon, 2001. [Film] Directed by Mitchell Cox. USA: Unified Film Organization and Mind Hunt Productions.

Push, 2009. [Film] Directed by Paul McGuigan. USA: Summit Entertainment, Icon Productions and Infinity Features Entertainment.

The Rage: Carrie 2, 1999. [Film] Directed by Katt Shea. USA: Red Bank Films and United Artists.

Rosemary's Baby, 1968. [Film] Directed by Roman Polanski. USA: William Castle Productions.

The Spell, 1977. [Film] Directed by Lee Philips. Charles Fries Productions and Stonehenge Productions.

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, 1974. [Film] Directed by Tobe Hooper. USA: Vortex.

The Body that “Melted into the Carpet”: Mortal Stains and Domestic Dissolution in Carol Morley’s *Dreams of a Life*

Rose Deller

How can we tell the story of a life when what remains are unnervingly “messy” fragments – dust, rot, a smell, a stain? This question lies at the heart of *Dreams of a Life* (2011), a recent “poetic documentary” from British director Carol Morley. Inspired by newspaper headlines relating the shocking discovery of Joyce Vincent’s body in her London flat three years after her death, *Dreams of a Life* traces an unwieldy pathway into Joyce’s life to make sense of the sensationalised yet vague media reports that announced the story. Responding to an overwhelming bewilderment at a person simply disappearing under the bright lights of the London metropolis, the incredulous, ever-present question of “how could this have happened?”, the film weaves together threads of testimony drawn from friends, former lovers, and colleagues of Joyce, as well as archival footage and dramatic reconstruction. This impressionistic stream of cinematic memorialisation in part rescues Joyce from the assumption that she must have been the victim of indifference for her death to be conceivable, perhaps even an example of a wasted or worthless life. Instead, the memories of those who knew Joyce reconstruct her as a figure of glamour and promise, an upwardly mobile young woman brimming with vitality and beauty.

While *Dreams of a Life* is a poignant tribute to an apparently forgotten life, this is a film that never fully loses sight of that difficult question: the materiality of what actually remains. In keeping with the traditions of poetic documentary, *Dreams of a Life* is attentive to the challenges of resurrecting one’s subject on the cinema screen. Although the film is littered with the very “stuff” of memory – old tapes, records, video footage, clothes – in a literal sense, *Dreams of a Life* suggests that what endures can often be very little. In this case, as a friend of Joyce states at the beginning of the film, “flies and a smell”, and the lingering stain of a rotting corpse: hardly the materials with which one might expect to build tender homage. Nevertheless, it is the documentary’s recurring references to a corpse so disintegrated that it was “melting into the carpet” – the body-as-stain – that form the focus of this article. The stubborn residual persistence of matter that is the stain stands as

testament to the past and its continued, obstinate intrusion upon the present. At the same time, as the trace of disintegration and decay, the stain underscores the disappearance, elusiveness and loss that haunts this documentary. This article examines how the image of the body-become-stain through anxiety-inducing processes of death and rot both provokes, and yet also frustrates the desire to recover a life seemingly lived between the cracks of vision.

"Flies and a smell and nobody noticed"

To introduce the "riddle" of Joyce Vincent (Bradshaw 44), a 38-year old British woman born to an Indo-Caribbean mother and a Grenadian father, whose body was discovered in her London flat in 2006 three years after her death, *Dreams of a Life* thrusts us into a *mise-en-scene*, or perhaps more aptly, a *mess-en-scene* that blends the suspense of cinematic horror with kitchen-sink realism.¹ After newspaper headlines announcing the discovery of a "badly decomposed" body stream across the screen, the camera pans over a series of objects: a shroud of dust on a kitchen table; mouldy, disintegrating fruit; a kitchen plug streaked with grime; an abandoned milk bottle left out of the fridge. A hand pushing frantically through the letterbox of a doorway flooded with mail disturbs this unnervingly suspended moment in the landscape of the everyday. Barbara Creed suggests that what we consider the quotidian – that which is "personal, ordinary, routine and unremarkable" (484) – contains within it the potential seeds of the extra-quotidian – those moments that strike us as out of the ordinary, or in some sense exceptional. In *Dreams of a Life*, the premature stillness of the everyday, set amidst the exterior hustle and bustle of contemporary London, provokes a creeping dread, the intuition of something, somehow, gone terribly amiss. The frozen spectacle of domesticity silently rotting at the seams suggests the uncanny slippage of the everyday into something unusual, even sinister: the realisation that this flat has become a death scene.

As the camera glides over grimy surfaces and collecting dust, the tangibility of these fragments resonates with the work of Laura Marks and Jennifer Barker, who have both spoken of a filmic haptic visuality in which the skin of the spectator is brought into intimate relation with the cinematic image. Following this tactile journey through rotting domesticity, dread is further heightened in this dramatic re-imagining as the reactions of the entering authorities are also shown. While their faces indicate shocked revulsion, it is the recoil of the onlookers – indeed, one woman actively retches – that implicates the body not only in the act of spectatorship, but more particularly in the experience of disgust. Crucially, however, the film cuts away from actually

showing the woman vomiting, and in so doing, foreshadows the eventual non-reveal that ends the scene. Despite building a palpable sense of anticipatory disgust by focusing on the corporeal responses of these intruders to the flat, the assumed object of revulsion, the corpse, remains potently unseen. The non-revelation of the corpse is consistent with traditions of documentary film in which, as Anita Bressi and Heather Nunn observe, death is frequently negotiated via allusion and concealment. However, *Dreams of a Life* goes further in stressing the sheer *impossibility* of completing the reveal. The failure to show the corpse is presented as an inevitability; this is, after all, a body so disintegrated that it was literally "melting into the carpet". Uttered by one journalist early in the film, this description is shocking in its macabre vividness; yet the documentary itself shows only a living-room floor bearing a vaguely body-shaped stain.

No body, just a stain. As the residue of the disintegrated corpse, the very paradigm of the abject,² the mark on the carpet carries a certain *frisson*. At the same time, as the culmination of a scene that slowly moves through the eerie haptic entropy of the everyday, there is something anti-climactic to the body-stain, an absence that arises from the realisation that "there's no body." In her discussion of rot as form in the film *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (Greenaway 1989) Eugenie Brinkema describes how the decaying body repulses due to its excessive, eruptive materiality. As she explains, "in death, more than elsewhere... the body is furiously *too much*" (Brinkema, *Rot's* Progress 86 (emphasis in original)). In contrast, *Dreams of a Life* provokes the sense that this stain is *too little*. This impression is heightened as a journalist and friends of Joyce acknowledge that no post-mortem could be carried out on Joyce's remains; correspondingly, no cause of death could be ascertained.³ The inability to give a forensic resolution to Joyce's demise suggests that this stain is somehow deficient. Rather than offer a substantive clue to the perturbing death scene, the stain is waste; debris; just a "bit of a mark on the carpet".

The sense of deficiency to the stain, including its failure to yield the revelatory knowledge typically attached to the post-mortem, undermines its capacity to offer a "solution" to the revulsion communicated by the disturbed faces and bodily comportment of the witnesses to the death scene. In her discussion of vomit and its privileged position in theorisations of disgust, Brinkema is critical of how revulsion is often contained within "narratives of provocation that bind it to the always-comforting logic of ordered causality" (Laura Dern's *Vomit* 52). This logic ensures that the experience of disgust is pinned down to a specific object – "*that* corpse; *this* rot; *these* maggots"

(Laura Dern's Vomit 61) – and, in so doing, rendered less disturbing through the ability to identify the cause of revulsion. These early scenes in *Dreams of a Life* initially seem to offer such a sense of comforting confirmation as the mark on the carpet is the lingering remnant of the corpse, thereby allowing the documentary to forego the visualisation of the dead body in a state of excessive putrefaction. Yet the simultaneous sense of impoverishment attached to the stain, its implied status as both a diminished residue of the lived body and of the abject fluidity of the corpse, concurrently resists this cause-and-effect logic by gesturing towards the unthinkable, the self that has become nothing more than a mark that antagonises all notion of "shape, coherence and substance" (Laura Dern's Vomit 60).⁴ Offering the stain as the scrap or remnant so utterly at odds with the imagined totality of the liveable body, *Dreams of a Life* challenges understandings of disgust that posit it as the result of physical proximity with a definable, legible object. Yet, in light of the theme of this special issue of *InterAlia*, the necessary visualisation of the stain in place of the corpse in the film is, crucially, less an encounter with bodily fluids, than with the solidified *trace* of the leaky body.

The body-become-stain evades the desire to give a reassuring structure of "ordered causality" to disgust in which one can link revulsion to a provocative concrete object, instead offering an encounter with the illegible trace of the fluid. Yet *Dreams of a Life* does still gesture towards the enduring allure of this cause-and-effect logic when confronting scenes of such disturbing horror. Seeping into the intimate realm of quotidian filth, the stain and its connotations of dissolution powerfully convey the most perplexing and distressing detail regarding Joyce's death: the fact she was only discovered after three years. In their work on entropy, Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss argue that "melting means falling into indifference" (181). Bois and Krauss here associate "indifference" with dissolution into amorphous homogeneity, the "flaccid leaking away of substance" that characterises entropic processes (181). In *Dreams of a Life*, visualising Joyce's body as nothing more than a mark on a carpet also potently suggests public indifference, a death that "nobody noticed", rather brutally collapsing bodily waste, the discharges and leakages of the body, into social refuse, those deemed to be worthless or discardable subjects. Yet, the impression that the stain must be the residue of a person forgotten in the shadowy margins of society is challenged as the film cuts between the imagined discovery of the flat and the ruminations of friends, former lovers, and colleagues of Joyce, whose testimonies provide the oral history that flows throughout *Dreams of a Life*.⁵ The visible distress and shock as they describe learning of Joyce's death counters the assumption that Joyce was a victim of simple indifference. The evident

disparity between the Joyce known in life and the imagined squalor of her death floods these early interviews with a sense of utter bewilderment. This prevailing confusion is heightened by the stain and its incapacity to provide the forensic answers desired, yet it simultaneously elevates the mark on the carpet from a piece of incidental detritus in a landscape of domestic squalor into the privileged sign of an *epistemological mess*.

So who was Joyce, and how could she have suffered such a death? The stain that indicates dissolution from three-dimensional "fleshy" life into a flattened mark means that the enigma of Joyce's passing not only disturbs the logic of cause-and-effect that often frames disgust (the certainty of being able to claim that it is *this* object that causes *my* revulsion), but also troubles the desire for visual evidence on the cinema screen. The anonymous trace of decay, the opaque stain, confounds the pursuit of immediate answers. Yet as Mary Ann Doane argues, challenges to the limits of cinematic vision can stimulate the desire for narrative. One journalist in the film states that Joyce's death is "this mystery that's suddenly thrown up and you just want to know more." The locution "thrown up" here describes the unanticipated emergence of an enigma, but also inadvertently carries connotations of vomiting. As a result, this summation of the drive to make sense of the opening milieu of *Dreams of a Life* implicitly merges the experience of disgust with the desire to know. This, in turn, transforms the stain from the ostensibly impotent refuse of the body into an epistemological quandary, a visual obstacle that concurrently provokes the hopeful drive to restore the logic of cause-and-effect to the riddle posed by Joyce's disintegrated body.

Recovering the traces

Dreams of a Life's ensuing attempt to make sense of this puzzling death scene resonates with the "pervasive documentary impulse" to organise the documentary film around a journey or quest (Bruzzi 101). A detective tenor to *Dreams of a Life* is correspondingly signalled through shots of investigative materials strewn over a single white wall. Towards the beginning of the film, the status of the investigation mirrors the squalor of the death scene as there is little more than a haphazard mess of post-it notes, photographs and scrawls of writing. However, as the documentary intermittently returns to this wall, it indicates the "taking shape" of its project to slowly piece together Joyce's life. The gradual cohesion and ordering of the information into a linear trajectory suggests that the film's ultimate desire is to clear up the physical and epistemological mess established at the start of *Dreams of a Life*. Multiple question marks on the wall highlight the

enduring difficulty of pinning down the film's subject in keeping with the tone of uncertainty seen to more generally pervade contemporary documentaries,⁶ yet the presence of this investigative wall continually helps to visualise the reconstruction of Joyce's story into a temporally linear narrative.

The teleological detective thrust to the documentary is, however, complicated by the interweaving of oral history and dramatisation throughout *Dreams of a Life*. Bressi and Nunn utilise the term "poetic documentary" to describe examples of the genre that imaginatively merge oral testimony, reconstruction and documentation; such documentaries have been characterised as "poetic" due to their supple transitions between fantasy, illusion, oral history and archival material. The combination of a linear quest-like structure and the impressionistic streams of testimony, footage and re-enactment that move between past and present found in *Dreams of a Life* also defined Morley's earlier documentary, *The Alcohol Years* (2000), in which she offers a "poetic retrieval" of her younger self through the memories of friends and acquaintances also living in Manchester in the 1980s. Just as *The Alcohol Years* utilises its form to conjure a vivid if partial impression of Morley, so too does *Dreams of a Life* use the different registers of the poetic documentary to reconstruct Joyce as a living, breathing entity on the cinema screen.⁷ Strikingly, this entwining of testimony and dramatisation particularly focuses on the beauty, glamour and promise of Joyce. In stark contrast to the scenes of disarray that commence the film, talking heads repeatedly refer to Joyce's "immaculate" appearance, her "well-spoken" voice, her successful job working for the treasury department of a London company, and her expensive clothes. Recollected as a charismatic, confident and stunning woman, these descriptions are enlivened, and thereby reinforced, by evocative re-imaginings of Joyce as a child and as an adult (played in the film by Alix Luka-Cain and Zawe Ashton respectively). Softly lit scenes of the young Joyce singing to her sisters and mother in the family home are accompanied by re-enactments of Joyce dancing and laughing at office parties, confirming her as a figure of vitality. As the vividness of Joyce is constituted through these transitions between imagined reconstruction and the oral history given by friends, this helps to further "clean up" Joyce's story by presenting her as someone shimmering with promise and beauty.

This admiring testimony is therefore crucial to the quest to resolve the "mystery thrown up" by Joyce's death, countering the abject connotations of that phrase. Rather than remain the site of

absolute horror, Joyce is restored as "somebody that I would like to be", in the words of one colleague. There are, however, momentary revelations that stand out amidst the overarching effusiveness of the recalled memories. Notably, as co-workers discuss Joyce's evident intelligence, mild shock is expressed when they learn that she had no qualifications despite her well-paid city career. That one friend responds by commenting that "I always put her in the same class as the rest of us... middle class" implicates Joyce in a process of masking: in this particular instance, of her class background, bolstered by a re-enactment of a young Joyce balancing books on her head and practising her elocution. The resulting sense of Joyce "coming from somewhere trying to get somewhere" establishes her as a figure in pursuit of what Lauren Berlant has referred to in *Cruel Optimism* as "the good life". For Berlant, this is a fantasy rooted in the social, the promise of "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality and lively, durable intimacy", which mobilises and sustains the enduring faith that individual lives can "add up to something" (2). Joyce's drive to get "something more out of life" implicates her in a narrative of class aspiration and the pursuit of "respectability." The flattering testimonies of friends and colleagues paying testament to Joyce's sophistication therefore create an initial impression of Joyce as somewhat akin to a "can-do girl", the contemporary figure identified by Angela McRobbie as "the pleasingly lively, capable and becoming young woman, black, white or Asian... the attractive harbinger of social change" (58). Presented as an upwardly mobile, beautiful and smart woman navigating the market-driven spaces of metropolitan London, Joyce appears to have overcome structural class inequalities and expectations to achieve respectability and belonging.

In identifying the "luminous" figure of the "can-do girl", McRobbie is critical of the degree to which this contemporary ideal has been depicted as not only able to neutralise enduring class divisions, but moreover transcend racial inequalities by "subsuming ethnicity into normative white femininity" (71). McRobbie's argument that contemporary ideals of femininity are still determined by white, middle-class norms does to some extent resonate with the documentary's depiction of Joyce's ambivalence regarding her racial identity. While Joyce's particular embodiment of sophistication and good manners are attributed by her friend, Kirk Thorne, to the Caribbean traditions that shaped her upbringing, others intimate her discomfort at other aspects of her familial background. A sense of embarrassment is particularly associated with her father, whom Joyce disparagingly referred to as "pork-pie" – a style of hat particularly popular amongst West Indian men in 1960s London. A former female flat-mate suggests that Joyce was sometimes

perceived as "stuck-up" amongst their friends, as someone who "didn't want to be black"; while evidently disagreeing with this characterisation of Joyce, she does describe trying to persuade her to find "a good black man" in contrast to the white "office types, English guys" that Kirk describes her as typically dating. That Joyce's subsequent immersion in a circle of black and mixed-race musicians not only brings her into contact with stars such as Issac Hayes, Betty Wright and Gil Scott-Heron, but moreover allows her to pursue her suggested love – singing – gives a sense of promise and excitement to her later move away from "office types". However, discussion of Joyce meeting Nelson Mandela during this time remains loaded with ambivalence. Acquaintance Elton Edwards suggests that the allure of Mandela for Joyce was due to his position as a global figure of importance; speculating that Princess Diana would have had a similar significance, he states of Joyce's meeting of Mandela, "it wouldn't have been that blackness... I don't think she was into the race thing. Black, white... I think she just wanted to get places". The suggestion that it is social mobility – the desire to "keep up" with others and "get places" – that fuels Joyce over and above explicit consideration of a politicised black identity is reinforced by the documentary in a following dramatised scene that depicts Joyce at home scrawling a "to-do list" in the back of a book by Maya Angelou. That it is the maintenance of feminised signs of outward success – aims such as "lose weight" and "nails" – that are implied as a priority for Joyce over and above the content of Angelou's work in the scene bolsters Elton's suggestion that Joyce was not explicitly into the "race thing". The scene does, nonetheless, signal the everyday labour required to pass as "somebody" in accordance to norms of sophistication and promise that those such as Beverley Skeggs have identified as being particularly central to white, middle-class standards of respectability and belonging.

Despite suggesting lingering anxieties surrounding class and racial identity, and the repeated quotidian efforts required to continually present oneself as "somebody", the testimonies in *Dreams of a Life* underscore Joyce as the ostensibly successful embodiment of social mobility and, in so doing, present something of a purification narrative that contrasts with the abject horror of the opening scenes of the film. Not only does the documentary visualise literal processes of cleaning by repeatedly showing extermination staff de-contaminating Joyce's flat, but in a more figurative move, these flattering testimonies "clean up" memories of Joyce. The consequences of this process are made explicit within *Dreams of a Life* as a recording of Joyce's voice is played to those who knew her, as well as several journalists who worked on the story. While friends and colleagues offer

contrasting responses to the voice and the extent to which it evokes the Joyce they specifically remember, one of the reporters summarises the shared sense of wonderment at the vividness of the recording: "you see, that's it, isn't it? We're not talking pathologists anymore, bodily fluids, stains on the carpet, or whatever. You're not talking about all that grim (sic), you're talking about a human being full of vibrancy". With the body-stain established as the prime symbol of "all that grim" within *Dreams of a Life*, a reminder of the "runny, gaseous, flowing, watery nature of bodies" (Longhurst 23), the journalist's comment directly acknowledges that this found footage can help to figuratively "purify" Joyce by rescuing her from the material erosion of the self visualised in the film's opening. Testimonies and archival materials not only give Joyce a fleshy vivacity, but they also restore her to a "clean and proper" body (Kristeva 8), helping to wipe away the taint of "bodily fluids, stains on the carpet", the corrupting traces of death and decay.

By following the momentary sonic resurrection of Joyce by immediately cutting back to a dusty tape lying on the floor of the flat in which she was found, the film nonetheless complicates the impression that its process of cinematic recovery necessarily banishes all spectres of decay and rot. David Eng and David Kanzanjian argue that "loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read and sustained" (2). The linking back of evocative recording to physical trace settled in the dust implies that the tape, so instrumental in giving palpability to Joyce, does not displace dirt, disorder and detritus; rather, it is found amongst it. In a discussion of the film in *Sight and Sound*, Morley emphasises the importance of visualising the material traces of Joyce to give the film "the texture of discovery" (Morley in Bradshaw 44). The frequent panning shots over the debris of Joyce's life counter the impression that these remnants are solely to be understood as a landscape of loss or signs of absolute eradication by suggesting that they can also be a source of recovery in the attempt to restore Joyce to cinematic vividness. The scene of abandoned domesticity that commences *Dreams of a Life* consequently seems less to signal disintegration than a necessary moment of cinematic immobilisation, freezing both space and time to halt "rot's ineluctable forward progress... presenting and bringing floating and fixed objects" into our sights (Brinkema, *Rot's Progress* 74). The seemingly barren landscape of death momentarily stills rot in order to bring before our gaze the visible traces of a life on the verge of dissolution.

This cinematic stilling, or slowing down, of decay resonates with Laura Mulvey's notion of a "delayed cinema" that allows for the revelation of something that has lain dormant, waiting to be noticed (9). Arguing that enduring fragments often speak to our fascination with the boundary between life and death, Mulvey's work contributes to a different understanding of the body-stain shown at the beginning of the documentary. Rather than function solely as an unintelligible smear that indicates the loss of materiality, the stain also stands as testament to former presence. This dual capacity of the stain moreover resonates with the work of Sheena Vacchani. While others, such as William Cohen and David Trotter, have emphasised the potentially productive capacities of filth and mess respectively, Vacchani specifically focuses on the stain, arguing that it can enable both "the manifestation and re-presencing of the excluded" (40). Despite often coming to consign subjects to invisibility due to its connotations of taint, the stain can also be a means by which to "bring flesh out of exile" (35). While a mark on a carpet is, on the one hand, an abject and unliveable residue, *Dreams of a Life* similarly suggests that traces, including stains, "do not simply lose intelligibility, but... continue to be hailed by creative possibilities" (Eng and Kazanjian 8). Marks on floors, discarded dresses covered in dust and an abandoned tape; all these contribute to the uncanny confusion of the life/death boundary as these seemingly inanimate remnants become "fleshed out" and enlivened, helping to give further fullness and vivacity to Joyce's cinematic image, to memorialise a subject otherwise lost between the cracks of vision.

Seeping into dissolution

Archival footage and dramatic re-imaginings help revitalise Joyce as a tangible figure of promise, restoring her to a vividness that counters the initial connotations of disappearance and eradication that otherwise accompany the body-stain. Instead, the staging of continued returns to material traces within the film becomes a "way to give a bodily envelope, to add an imprint to the 'evidence' of presence" (Elsaesser 18). One of the most evocative examples of the creative potential of such remains is a scene in which Joyce sings into her hairbrush in her flat, dressed in an electric blue dress. As a powerful complement to stories about Joyce's interactions with famous singers, the living-room performance in front of the mirror is a familiar screen conceit that conveys how "ordinary lives articulate with fantasies of being 'somebody'" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 24). In this scene, the documentary brings the fantasy of musical stardom to life. As the camera swings around Joyce in continuous sweeping close-up, her face is lit up like a screen idol. Joyce blows kisses to an imaginary audience and even winks just beyond the camera; while her gaze does not quite meet

the lens, this moment that almost breaks the fourth wall seems to give particular affirmation to this mesmerising scene, heightening the possibility that we can witness her desires brought into being. Referencing both the tape of her singing and the blue dress later shown in the detritus of the empty flat, this scene not only gives a further vividness to Joyce's image, but moreover indicates the potential of these discarded remnants to bring intimate fantasies to life.

And yet, revealingly, this fantasy scene in front of the mirror cannot quite hold. Poignantly, the moment splinters; as the record runs to its end, we see Joyce crouch down and cry into her hands. The beautiful "starry" lighting fades, revealing the smears on the cupboard doors behind Joyce, the plate of food left out on a side-table. This disillusioning dirt signals the visual weight of attrition that the banal everyday can inflict on dreams of "the good life". The sense that the desire to be "special" or noticed can only be temporarily sustained resonates with Adam Phillips's recent discussion of the notion of the "unlived life", those shadow dream lives of unfulfillable desires than run in parallel to quotidian existence. Yet, the particular title and lyrics of the song Joyce performs, *My Smile is Just a Frown, Turned Upside Down*, also suggest an irrepressible secret masked beneath Joyce's veneer of feminine perfection and vitality. The impression of a threatening "underbelly" to Joyce's surface vibrancy increases throughout the documentary, such as in another notable scene in which several of Joyce's friends reflect on their experiences sharing a house with her in West London. While her former flat-mates praise her beauty profusely by comparing her with the popular singer Sade, they admit that Joyce often left the bathroom in a dirty state. The overlapping of these comments transforms the anecdote into a shared confession, even if the collective laughter inspired by the memory of "the ring around the tub, yes, like a Saturn ring" concurs with the overall impression of the house-share as a happy time. However, the slightly visible recoil as Kirk exclaims "I wouldn't go in there with my flip-flops!" insinuates a vaguely repellent grubbiness beneath Joyce's otherwise beautiful exterior.

Domestic slovenliness in the bathroom may not appear particularly significant. After all, as Robyn Longhurst argues, the bathroom is a liminal space for the maintenance of cleanliness, being a realm "in which bodily boundaries are broken and then made solid again" (66). Standing out, nonetheless, amidst the general praise for Joyce's appearance, this striking glimpse at something "dirty" beneath Joyce's public persona establishes a growing surface/depth tension within the documentary. As the narrative of *Dreams of a Life* works both to *recover* Joyce as a living, breathing

entity, and simultaneously *uncover* something lurking beneath this image, this harkens back to the desire to link the body-stain into a logic of "ordered causality", to offer an explanation for the particular circumstances of Joyce's death. However, the corrosion of Joyce's glamorous reputation through references to her messiness also links this surface/depth tension with pre-existing frameworks within which both the allure and "fall" of femininity have been aesthetically negotiated. Rosemary Betterton argues that the contrast between outer beauty and rotten depth has long structured figurations of femininity across the visual arts; in cinema, this tension has particularly informed the figure of the *femme fatale*. As a complement to the subtle investigative tone of the documentary, *Dreams of a Life* is interspersed with nods to the *film noir* genre more generally; for instance, in the use of shadowy lighting for shots of nighttime London, and the framing of Joyce in a blue dress as an homage to the traditional sartorial styling of the *film noir*. Yet, it is the epistemological drive to unravel Joyce as "a mystery that we might never solve" that confirms her as a potential *femme fatale* figure within the documentary (Morley in Bradshaw 45). The unknowable nature of the *femme fatale*, exemplifying the supposed riddle or enigma of femininity, positions her as the cinematic paradigm of the epistemological trauma (Doane). In parallel with the stain, the *femme fatale* signals a crisis of vision, because "she never is what she seems to be" (Doane 1). As Doane explains, her position at the limits of knowledge prompts our desire to peel back her layers in an "epistemological striptease" that seeks to expose something beneath the veneer of femininity. *Dreams of a Life* undertakes a similar process of unravelling and exposure, whether in shots of Joyce crouching and crying in her living room, or testimonies to her secret grubbiness in the bathroom of a shared house.

With the documentary's dramatisations probing beneath Joyce's glamorous exterior, her immaculate image begins to leak and sag as though the repressed signs of dirt and decay are spilling out onto the screen. Davinia Quinlivan has spoken of a filmic "hyperrealist corporeality" as attention to the body that "fleshes out the otherwise discrete, liminal or even invisible moments that are normally untraceable, forgotten or lost" within the realm of the everyday (152). Quinlivan's notion of "hyperrealist corporeality" aptly describes increasing attentiveness to the micro-gestures of Joyce's body in *Dreams of a Life*, a focus that suggests her as a subject in painful decline, signalled through her tired eyes, her unkempt hair, her tight breathing, and shots of her rubbing cream into an open sore on her leg. It is this domestic slovenliness that is particularly central to insinuations of disintegration as Joyce is furthermore shown drinking milk straight out of the bottle,

catching the drops of white liquid that threaten to trickle down her chin; in another scene, we see her almost dripping jam onto her dressing gown. While these moments sit more in the field of mundane messiness than the "violently visceral and putrid" unmasking more typically inflicted upon the *femme fatale* (Ravetto 54), the polarity between earlier testaments to Joyce's glamour and this apparent "underbelly" is significantly revealed through errant, uncontained fluidity. Open wounds and spilt fluids come to threaten the maintenance of Joyce as a clean and proper body by reminding us not only of the repressed viscosity of the body, but more particularly, the body-stain that haunts the documentary from its very beginning.

Not only do these seeping fluids jeopardise the recovery of Joyce as a beautiful and glamorous figure, but they also suggest the eruptive return of her inauspicious background, the otherwise evaded forces of social exclusion and inequality, as the documentary builds to the revelation that Joyce left her aspirational job in the city to work as a cleaner. Earlier in the documentary, anecdotes about her untidiness prompt one friend to state that he thought "she is going to have to get a maid". There is uncomfortable irony in the fact that it is Joyce who is later employed in the cleaning profession. Narrated as a secret Joyce tried to hide from key confidant and ex-boyfriend, Martin, this revelation prompts surprise from her colleagues; as one ruminates, "I'm just trying to picture her doing that sort of work, and I just can't do it, you know. Knowing the sort of person she was... I suppose I'm trying to picture her doing it all dolled up and you know, in her immaculate dress with her hair". The vehemence of their surprise is partly grounded in the disparity between her surface performance of an "immaculate", sophisticated femininity and the occupational taint that surrounds so-called "dirty work": the term for the stigmatisation of those working in the cleaning and hygiene professions. This stigma operates on the principle that "it is not the people who generate the domestic dirt, mess or waste who are tainted by its stain but those who clean it away" (West 73). Since "the avoidance of dirty work remains a marker of social and cultural ascendancy" (West 74), the uncovering of this secret implies Joyce's slippage from being "somebody" into an invisible, subterranean labour force of urban London that has been criticised for its reliance on migrant workers⁸. Given the insinuation of Joyce's class aspirations and her desire to "get something more out of life", her imbrication in "dirty work" suggests the return of those relentless social forces that erode the pursuit of "respectability", and dreams of the good life.

Dreams of a Life is haunted by the sense that our grasp upon Joyce, her restoration to corporeal vibrancy, is essentially flimsy, being continually borne backwards towards the body-stain that is revealed at the beginning of the film, yet also stands as the impending future-to-be. The overarching fragility to Joyce's cinematic image comes to parallel her social precarity within the dirty/pretty confines of contemporary London. Unlike Manchester in *The Alcohol Years*, London is not here subjected to explicit criticism, but the allusion to the power of Manchester's self-mythology in Morley's previous documentary resonates with the subtle critique of London's allure in *Dreams of a Life*. While Joyce's successful city job initially positions her as a poster girl of social mobility, the documentary gestures towards merciless structural inequalities that render London "both a pretty utopian place of opportunity and a dirty space of social exclusion" (Whittaker 22). However, the documentary's exposure of the wider "fraying fantasies" central to Berlant's notion of "the good life", including job security and durable intimacy, is always located in the specificity of Joyce's narrative as the focal site of disillusionment and disappointment. Continually the seeming stability of the everyday uncannily ruptures to reveal something "darker" under the surface: the revelation that Joyce had to leave jobs in the city due to sexual harassment; testaments to Joyce's beauty transforming into Martin's expressions of jealousy and an uncharacteristic moment of violence towards another admirer; the puncturing of rosily lit scenes of Joyce's childhood through her mother's premature death; the belief that Joyce sheltered in a women's refuge to escape domestic violence at the hands of an unidentified ex-boyfriend. Trotter argues in his discussion of mess that "it is unusual for a stain to nurture fantasy, but not impossible" (3). *Dreams of a Life's* imaginative use of residues and fragments suggests that the challenge of utilising the "messy" remnants of a life is less about their capacity to conjure up fantasy than about their ability to *sustain* it. As the eradicating connotations of the body-stain repeatedly return throughout the film, we are continually borne back to the opening scene of death, both as the residue of physical decay and the symbol of the attrition of Joyce's suggested desires and hopes.

Television/trash

Since it seems the film cannot "stop the rot", the inexorable progress of putrefaction gradually ensnares Joyce in the barren domestic landscape introduced at the beginning of *Dreams of a Life*. By increasingly containing Joyce within the flat, lit only by the flickering light of the television, *Dreams of a Life* nods to media reports which assumed that Joyce must have been a loner or a couch potato for her death to be conceivable. Not only does the film repeatedly emphasise that

Joyce died at home in front of her television, but even more strikingly, the television was still on when she was discovered three years later. From the first shot of the documentary, a television screen of static, this supposed source of communication and information is a continually murmuring presence implicated in the dissolution of Joyce's life, and the horror of her isolated death. As one journalist states in the film, "I think that's the really depressing thing. You've got Saturday night TV, X Factor, Big Brother... all these people speaking at this corpse." The idea of such a programme "speaking *at* this corpse" ascribes a passivity to television-watching that resonates with wider perceptions of the medium as culturally stultifying. For instance, screenwriter Abi Morgan recently discussed the wider dismissal of television as that which "rots the senses in the head. It kills the imagination dead". Although Morgan proceeds to defend television from this association with sensual malaise, her allusion to its perceived degrading capacities is eerily reminiscent of Joyce's own disintegration in front of the same medium. While the creative potential attributed to the residues of Joyce's life throughout *Dreams of a Life* does counter the assumption that rot and the imagination are necessarily antithetical, the entropic influence of television is gestured towards in the documentary through the opening death scene that gives the supposedly corrupting nature of television spectatorship a gruesome literalness. As the film moves immediately from the nauseated faces of those discovering Joyce's (absent) body to a shot of the television, this not only directly implicates the television in the horrifying circumstances of her death, but moreover evokes the enduring association between televisual transmission and physical and mental wasting.⁹

That the journalist particularly imagines "Big Brother" as part of the televisual output blaring at Joyce's corpse moreover heightens the "dirty" connotations of Joyce's death in front of the screen due to the frequent appraisal of reality television as "trashy". Typically seen as a lowbrow corruption of the documentary form, reality television often trades off the spectacularisation of the everyday and the mundane. While its blend of the informative and the entertaining has been commercially successful, it has also been deemed a "trivialising and contaminating force" that evidences a cultural dumbing down for a number of critics (Kilborn 2). The insinuation of a diseased, contagious quality to 'lowbrow' televisual output in Richard Kilborn's use of "contaminating" resonates with the work of Amy West, who links the figuratively "dirty" reputation of reality television with the genre's own focus upon physical grime and filth as signs of the "uber-ordinariness" of its subjects. The reification of dirt as an indication of the "real-ness" so integral to

the genre speaks to reality's television's fetishisation of the banal.¹⁰ However, the genre also plays off the negative connotations of dirt by creating moralising storylines and voyeuristic gazes that invite judgment upon the everyday performances of its subjects. Spectacles of dirt are therefore privileged signs of intimacy and heightened "real-ness" within the realm of reality television whilst retaining their long-standing associations with moral degeneracy.

The moralising tenor of reality television has, moreover, been seen as particularly intensified for women. In her examination of the genre's depictions of femininity, Valerie Walkerdine argues that reality television particularly perpetuates the belief that working-class women are "shameful, dirty and to be improved" (225). Helen Wood and Bev Skeggs have similarly identified femininity as the focus of the judgmental narratives of reality television, in part due to the enduring belief that women are the guardians of the intimate (Berlant). As the genre typically propagates the idea that "not to be feminine, married and/or a mother is to be pathologized" (8), Woods and Skeggs suggest that storylines seek to restore women to ideals of "proper", self-controlled femininity. This dynamic between voyeuristic pleasure at the "dirtiness" of reality television's subjects and its enforcement of redemption narratives grounded in the removal of squalor resonates with the tension at the heart of *Dreams of Life* in which figurations of Joyce are torn between the putrid and the purified: the haunting memory of the body-stain battling with the restoration of the glamorous exterior. Utilising the banal minutiae of quotidian dirt to give Joyce a sense of presence yet also suggest her later decline into alienation and isolation, *Dreams of a Life* gestures towards the belief that "proper" femininity is maintained by keeping dirt and disorder not only at the margins of the self, but moreover of the home.

That the visual disintegration of Joyce's attractive feminine exterior in her barren flat is accompanied by speculation on Joyce's maternal desires towards the end of *Dreams of a Life* consequently appears to mobilise the judgmental gaze of reality television enthralled with the (self-)destructiveness of "failed" femininity. Friends of Joyce wistfully ruminate on whether Joyce's life might have been different had she married one of her former boyfriends, either Martin or Alistair. The suggestion that this may have prevented the "mess" shown at the beginning of the documentary evokes Berlant's work in *The Female Complaint* on the sentimental attachments we may cling to in elevating romantic love or marriage as redemptive fantasies that could keep death, and its corollary, decay at bay. These fantasies are given particular allure as the documentary builds

towards Martin's declaration of love for Joyce. While this sincere and quietly devastating scene provides some of the most dramatic evidence for Morley's claim that the film is a "powerful love story" (Morley in Morley and McDonald), *Dreams of a Life* does not leave the affective seductiveness of this scene entirely unquestioned. The interweaving of Martin's pronouncement with the comments of other friends who suggest that marriage was not possible due to Martin's father's concerns about mixed-race children signals the enduring social inequalities – in this instance, racism – that punctures the supposed universality of fantasies of marriage, respectability, and the nuclear family. It is the corrosive force of internalising these barriers that are contrastingly acknowledged by another former boyfriend, Alistair. Having movingly referred to Joyce as having been "my friend, my lover, my partner... my everything" earlier in the documentary, he speculates that perhaps dreams of marriage and children felt "too good" for Joyce, provoking, for her, the anxious question of "I want this but is it really me?" Thus, while another friend suggests that marriage was, for Joyce, "the life she should have had", the juxtaposition of differing testimonies invites us to reflect on the social structures that put these supposedly sustaining collective fantasies of lived fulfilment out of Joyce's reach.

That *Dreams of a Life* ultimately questions the sentimental fantasy that marriage and children could have saved Joyce, without, moreover, invoking explicit judgment upon those giving testimony in the film, therefore sets up a contrast between the moralising narratives of reality television, and the social agenda historically attributed to the documentary form. Kilborn has argued that the recent trend for reality television has generated an emergent nostalgia for past eras of socially driven documentary and Public Service Broadcasting. The association of Big Brother with Joyce's death in front of the television certainly suggests a critique of our supposed "communication society" by implying that social media exacerbate divisiveness and apathy, making forgotten lives possible. However, just as the documentary ascribes a creative potential to the otherwise abject residues of Joyce's life, so too does it counter the impression that the "contaminating" force of television always "kills the imagination dead" in intermittently suggesting television as a possible portal of connection between Joyce and her friends. With the documentary at times imagining itself directly speaking to Joyce through the television by showing testimonies playing to Joyce on the screen in her flat, the film implies that the supposedly degrading forces of television, its contagious networks of information, may have a sustaining effect. In this sense, the film does implicitly acknowledge the extent to which the "dirty" connotations of television hold the capacity for pleasure. In his article

'Television as Lover: Part I', Brian Ott emphasises the potential *jouissance* of television watching; those moments in which the television invites the viewer to "dissolve into it" like a lover offering an ecstatic pleasure that can override the passive and ideological effects attributed to the medium (26). The implied dissolution of Joyce in front of the television is not wholly reconcilable with the subject-dissolving *jouissance* of Ott's account; indeed, it is the replacement of "lively, durable intimacy" with the compensatory networks of the television-lover that are implicated in Joyce's isolated death.¹¹ Nevertheless, despite its allusions to television as atomising and numbing, *Dreams of a Life* concurrently weaves a fantasy of reconnection into the medium it otherwise seems to question.

What is nonetheless striking about the scenes of television watching is that Joyce is not only shown to lack the explicit "pleasure" celebrated in Ott's account, but towards the end of the documentary she is shown to be increasingly disengaged from the narratives streaming out from her set, culminating in a shot of her switching it off with her remote control. In light of recurring ethical debates around spectatorship and representation in the documentary genre, the decision to show Joyce ambivalently captivated by these stories indicates the boundaries of cinematic memorialisation. In *Selfless Cinema*, Sarah Cooper contends that ethical approaches to documentary acknowledge that lives do not end at the limits of the filmmaker's vision. Showing Joyce actively turning off the flattering narratives playing out on the television encourages us to reflect upon the difficulties of paying testimony; what memories do we believe honour the life of another? What stories capture the experiences, desires and dreams that constitute other lives, particularly those lived out of view? Joyce's imagined lack of interest certainly communicates a sense of numbness that resonates with a broader contemporary "aesthetics of disengagement": what Christine Ross has termed "an acting out of states of depression, encompassing boredom, stillness, communicational rupture, loss of pleasure, withdrawal, the withering of one's capacity to remember and project, to dream, desire and fantasize" (xvi). However, it also leaves space for acknowledging a different interpretation of Joyce's life that does not disregard agency. Alistair suggests that perhaps "Joyce didn't want to be found." That his comment is followed by a re-enactment of Joyce learning of her mother's death at the age of eleven somewhat counters this argument by pointing to the traumatic circumstances that shaped Joyce's upbringing. Nonetheless, rather than solely position Joyce as a symbol of structural invisibility and the body-stain as evidence of the insurmountable forces of social, economic and physical degradation, Alistair's

suggestion does create space for acknowledging the possibility (however uncomfortable) that the illegible stain is also "symptomatic of a desire not to be seen" (Clark): deliberately out of sight, rather than pushed to the margins. If this essay earlier links disgust to the stimulation of a desire for narrative, a cause-and-effect linearity that can explain the disintegration of Joyce into the abject body-stain, *Dreams of a Life* does concede that the stain, and by extension Joyce herself, resists such transformation into absolute transparency or legibility. While the title of *Dreams of a Life* has been taken to denote the process of recovering an unfulfilled and, in some sense, unlived existence, it also indicates how the seemingly palpable textures of residues and remnants can only imagine – dream up – the fabric of another life.

It is this overarching sense of elusiveness to Joyce's story that therefore permeates the documentary. As one friend of Joyce comments, "it's like she never existed. She was a figment of our imagination. She was a story. It was like someone we made up, almost."¹² This comment intimates the unbridgeable gulf between the Joyce they knew and her obscured "private" life whose longings, fantasies and struggles are, of course, implied to be constructed and eroded by wider social and economic forces. Yet, it is the tantalising "almost" that stands out in this sentence; this is, after all, a documentary that introduces us to the "almost-fluid" of the stain, the "almost-disappeared": not quite eroded, not quite legible, but not quite absent, either. It is the alluring promise of this "almost" that propels the desire to recover Joyce, a desire channelled in *Dreams of a Life* into recurrent returns to suspended scenes of rotting domesticity which seem to offer something palpable to enable the process of cinematic resurrection. While the imaginative potential of these residues and remnants is at times mesmeric, Joyce's ultimate disengagement from flattering testaments to her life, and the splintering of scenes filled with luminescent promise, remind us that the physical remains of a life, including the stain on the carpet, can only be "as a shadow... incomplete and concealing" (Vachhani 34). To this degree, the hope that the stain and its subsequent associated remnants signal not only dissolution and loss but also "the texture of discovery", almost-gone-but-not-yet, provides the documentary with its poignant vividness, but also the self-acknowledged limit to the process of materialising memory.

This tension between the immortalising and decaying aspects of the body-stain – between its capacity to still absolute loss as a material trace and its concurrent evidence of disintegration and rot – permeates the final scene of the documentary. As Joyce lies on the floor of her flat in front of

the television, we recognise her as being in visible pain, perhaps even in the process of dying, due to the laboured rise and fall of her wheezing chest. This focus upon Joyce's breathing emphasises her as an embodied subject that "creates another dimension of the lived body on screen for the viewer; it lends it value and shape through the suggestion of a human physicality that can almost be felt" (Quinlivan 161). As the camera glides across from Joyce to the shards of glitter enmeshed in the carpet and presents lying haphazardly on the floor, there is a sense that the corporeality of the body is being directly translated, perhaps even rendered equivalent to, these fragments: the posthumous remnants that are drawn upon within the documentary. Yet, the palpability of the body and these objects are undercut by the final shot of the film. One of the few archival images shown in *Dreams of a Life*, a video of Joyce listening to Nelson Mandela is utilised as culminating footage. Earlier in the documentary, this piece of video is received as particularly revealing evidence of Joyce's immersion in a life of promise to the extent that it is shown repeatedly playing on the television screen in Joyce's flat. Aptly then, the film ends by returning us to this video with the camera closing in on Joyce's face. The quality of the footage means that as the camera moves closer, Joyce becomes increasingly fragmented. Leaving us with a pixelating image of Joyce references the fragmentation of society that *Dreams of a Life* subtly implicates in the creation of forgotten lives. Yet, it also underscores something ungraspable, fleeting in these material remains. The "messy" quality of the footage reminds us of the stain on the carpet that is implied to be an evocative testament to presence that could, just possibly, bring "flesh out of exile" (Vacchani 35). However, the distortion of Joyce's face into a smear of pixels undermines the tangibility of this footage, the capacity to seize upon it as a transparent or fully legible trace of Joyce. As Joyce's face turns to almost meet the camera fully, this signals the documentary's ambivalent desire to immortalise, or at least, to give "more life",¹³ through cinematic resurrection, and its concurrent acknowledgement of the relentless forward march of material loss.

Notes

¹ Thanks to the editors who suggested this theme-appropriate play on *mise-en-scene*, as well as other invaluable comments on the essay. Thank you also to Jackie Stacey, who provided vital and insightful feedback on various versions of this article.

² Julia Kristeva identifies the corpse as the "utmost of abjection" (4), deeming it "the most sickening of wastes" (3). While *Powers of Horror* has its own predecessors (most notably, Sigmund Freud's "Totem and Taboo" and Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*), Kristeva's summation of the corpse as the paradigm of the abject has shaped subsequent discussions of "dirt" and "mess"; see,

for example, William Cohen's discussion of "filth" in which he states that the corpse is "perhaps the filthiest of all" (xi).

³ As the documentary makes clear, an inquest declared an open verdict regarding Joyce's death, with no suspicion of foul play (this ruling is, however, briefly questioned by some of Joyce's friends in the film).

⁴ The particular impossibility of imagining oneself dissolving into a stain resonates with Cohen's comments on the limits to how much we can envisage our own death; as he observes, "one can perhaps happily imagine being dust, but not being putrefied" (xxv).

⁵ As the documentary makes clear, Joyce's family chose to remain anonymous and do not therefore participate in *Dreams of a Life*. In the DVD Extra, "When Carol Met Kevin", Carol Morley does state that the family have seen the documentary in a special screening.

⁶ See Stella Bruzzi.

⁷ In her discussion of contemporary documentary and its increasing enthrallment with issues of "memory, subjectivity, uncertainty" (103), Bruzzi utilises the term "performative documentary" for films that challenge the association between the documentary form and the revelation of "truth". That Bruzzi sees the visible (if self-questioning) presence of the film-maker as one key characteristic of "performative documentary" leads me to utilise "poetic documentary" as the more apt description for *Dreams of a Life*. In light of this distinction, I would suggest that Morley's interrogation of her younger self in her preceding film, *The Alcohol Years*, arguably resonates more with the emergent conventions of "performative documentary", although it shares many of the "poetic" formal qualities of *Dreams of a Life*. For an interview with Morley that touches on the similarities between *The Alcohol Years* and *Dreams of a Life*, see the video, "Alcohol Years + Q and A".

⁸ For more on "dirty work", see Ruth Simpson et al.

⁹ This is not to deny the long-standing academic debates over television spectatorship, in which many have sought to stress viewers as active producers of meaning, rather than empty vessels. Although I would suggest that television still remains a particularly potent sign of passivity in the popular imagination (often blamed alongside other social media, for example, in contemporary reports on growing levels of obesity in the UK), see Brian Ott's article "Television as Lover, Part I" for more on the debate surrounding the active/passive nature of television watching.

¹⁰ See, for example, Anita Bressi and Heather Nunn.

¹¹ Indeed, in Ott's accompanying article, 'Television as Lover: Part II', which offers a first-person account of the ecstatic pleasures of channel surfing, he acknowledges that his particular experience of televisual *jouissance* was prompted when he and his life partner had to live apart.

¹² Strikingly, one talking head in *The Alcohol Years* offers the same description of Morley: "Carol Morley was a figment of our imagination." This suggests a shared theme in both documentaries regarding the difficulty of grasping the elusive, fragmented quality of subjectivity as well as the extent to which we are constructed through the eyes of others, in keeping with Bruzzi's afore-

mentioned summation of contemporary documentaries as being particularly concerned with "memory, subjectivity, uncertainty" (see note 7).

¹³ This phrase comes from Adam Phillips, who argues that the wish for immortality has been displaced by a contemporary desire for a fuller life, the dream of "getting more out of life": simply put, "the promise of *more life*" (xv, my emphasis).

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Fluid Fat: Considerations of Culture and Corporeality

Karin Sellberg and Ann Sellberg

4:11 I can assure you is no time for indulgence,
for silliness, to rethink life's bargain.
It is the moment, instead, glasses askew,
to lift each thigh from overnight caress
of garlic, fresh bay leaf, home-harvested thyme,
to massage flesh under cold water
with priestly certainty, free all excess of salt,
lay each upon its pallet of skin and fat.

Gaylord Brewer, *Duck Confit*

Duck confit is a traditional Gasconne dish of choice. It is a monument or celebration of the "peasant bird" (Schneider, p. 50); a method through which the delicate flesh is bathed, caressed and finally dissolved in its own juices – and primarily its own fat. The duck meat is meant to "melt on the tongue"; to disintegrate at our mere touch (dartagnan.com). Meat is separated from excess matter, and when this matter is reintroduced it proves simultaneously gentle, loving, disarming and destructive.

The philosophy of the palate (or the plate) extends to the philosophy of embodiment – as this is indeed how fat tends to be thought of in contemporary culture in general. We separate fat and flesh conceptually, like we do on the cutting board (whether this be in our kitchens or our operating theatres). *There's no threat from fat. Yellow like butter, wobbly like a balloon. Shining, smooth. It cushions, it pads. It provides a shelter, a parachute, when at times the intestinal wall is breached. Such a friendly, unthreatening substance on the inside, and yet how we deplore it. It's our luxury, our excess, our sin. The system we think we could do without.*

In the following fluid ruminations, we contemplate and chew over the politics and poetics of body fat – as well as the interior/exterior, stable/ephemeral, solid/fluid binaries these have come to

straddle in contemporary culture. Correlating our thoughts and experiences, as a cultural historian and theorist and a medical doctor/writer – two specialists of embodiment on different sides of another discursive divide – we negotiate the processes and transformations that occur inside and outside the body as fat is ingested, digested and divested in the corporeal and cultural body-machine, both on a physiological and a conceptual plane. As we manipulate and melt the cultural boundaries we encounter, we find that fat is as scientifically as it is socially ephemeral. Fat is a “wobbly” substance, and a simultaneously substantial and insubstantial fluid. It is the body matter we refuse to consider, but we can’t live without.

There has been a surge of fat studies in recent feminist academia, and numerous special issues, collections and articles including Susie Orbach’s seminal *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay’s *Fat Studies Reader*, Samantha Murray’s ‘Fat Bodily Being’ special issue of *Somatechnics* and Tove Solander’s article ‘Fat Feminism’ have considered how fat affects conceptions of self and identity. There is very little scholarship on the ontological perimeters of fat as a corporeal substance, however. Feminist studies tend to focus on how fat as an *exterior addition* to the idea of the female body beautiful affects our sense of self, but seldom touch on how fat as an *interior part* of us always already functions within the continual constitution of said self. Susie Orbach argues that the disconnection between fat and other types of body tissues creates an imaginary boundary between our idea of our bodies and our actual anatomical constitution. She describes how people suffering from eating disorders and obesity tend to imagine a *real* or *true* body underneath the layers of fat that make up their physical shape (2006, p. 77). Fat is seen as a liminal or transitory substance that comes and goes, but never substantially affects the more stable and essential parts underneath. Fat belongs to the Imaginary realm, rather than the experience of the Real. As Karin Sellberg has argued elsewhere, “fat becomes somehow disconnected from corporeal experience: it is the clouding aspect, or the veil, behind which ‘real experience’ hides” (2014, p. 100). Susie Orbach describes this conception of fat in terms of a pathological thought pattern, but it is not entirely dissimilar to the way in which fat is considered in contemporary culture in general. It even permeates contemporary medical discourses. *With other tissue I’m careful, almost reverent. I’m making the hole in the skin as small as possible, I handle the intestines like a fragile, pulsating, porcelain vase. A careless cut, a sloppy move, and the magic might be broken. The outside world of food and faeces intrudes into the peritoneal cavity, causing disaster. That’s not how it is with fat. I pull it, I tear at it, I rip it out. A little more, a little less, it doesn’t matter. There’s*

nothing to hold on to, the grip of the instruments is poor. We cut through, we dissect, looking for the treasure underneath.

According to Orbach, we have started to conceive of fat as subsidiary to the rest of our physical makeup due to patriarchal ideas of feminine petiteness, anorexic body ideals and harmful influences from recent fat-phobic media and culture. This does not seem entirely right, however. The rejection of fat is not just a feminine or feminist issue – fat has been excluded from the Western *Body Actual* for centuries and this includes images of both genders. Vesalius's famous models from *De Corporis Humani Fabrica* (1543) portray the human body in various stages of dissective dismantlement, but even his most complete corporeal schemas, like his sketch of the muscular tissue in table 1, book 2 (see Fig. 1), give rise to an idea of a body entirely devoid of fat. Vesalius's man even holds onto and contemplates his removed skin, but his subcutaneous fat is nowhere to be seen.

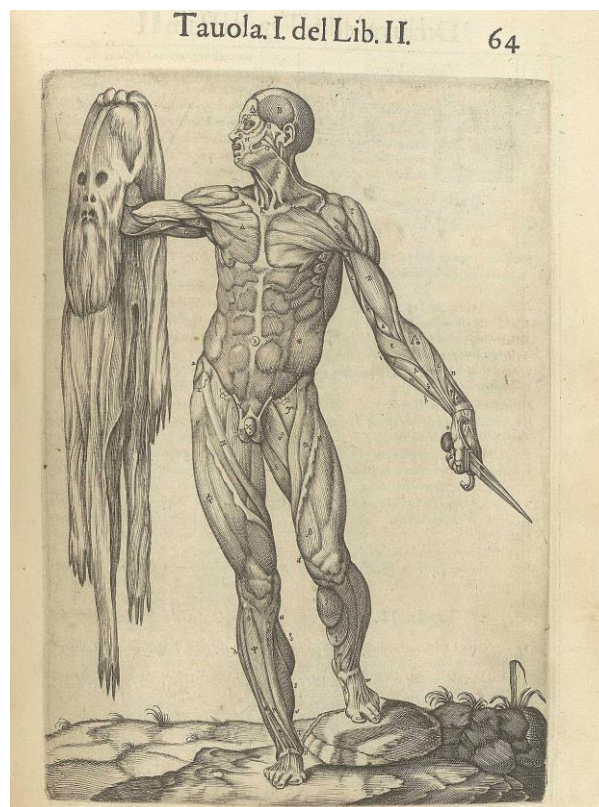


Fig 1. Vesalius, table 1, book 2, p. 64.

The fat-free perspective developed in Vesalius's sixteenth-century anatomical drawings is not exclusive to early modern anatomical models. It has remained throughout the centuries in Western medical discourse. Contemporary anatomical models similarly tend to scale off the layers of fat that would usually cover and embed the organs and muscle tissue of a healthy body. *How was fat taught in anatomy classes at medical school? Not much. The removable organs on the plastic doll were cleanly dissected, even though some layers of subcutaneous fat were visible in the transversal cut of the abdominal wall. The mamillae were also displayed in their full fatty splendour.*

The absence of fat in contemporary ideas of corporeality has become a feminist issue because the few spaces in which fatty substances are recognised as part of our physiology *at all* are typically recognised as female sites of embodiment. The only spaces where fat is allowed to emerge are those areas already "other" to the typical "body of man". As Luce Irigaray argues in *This Sex Which is Not One*, any physical parts that are not firm and stable have become encoded as feminine in Western culture (p.106); however, whether we look at a male or a female body, what is really striking about human corporeality is the contrast and juxtaposition between fluid and solid, muscle and fat. *When we open up a real person, the fat we see both is and isn't part of the general structure. If we make a midline cut, slicing through the epigastrical region, being careful to circumvent the navel, and continue down toward the lower part, we will first be met by the stomach supporting the omentum majus, a fatty curtain protecting the intestines. If we pull it to the side, the intestines will pop out, tossing and turning and wriggling like worms – our internal Medusa head. But if we push them to the side, most other organs underneath are imbedded in fat and connective tissue. It keeps them put, pads them and connects them. Fat is both outside and inside the body, but it is also both outside and inside the organs. It muddles the borders and defies classification.*

Dietary Fat

As Jane Bennett establishes in *Vibrant Matter*, all edible substances to some extent straddle the boundaries between inside and outside, self and other. They exhibit what Gilles Deleuze calls a "vagabond" materiality; "a propensity for continuous variation that is elided by 'all the stories of matter-form'" (Bennett, p. 50; Deleuze, 1979). Vagabond matter simultaneously metabolises, merges and transforms on one level, and on another level remains intact. Bennett ventriloquises the words of Maud Ellmann's *The Hunger Artists*:

[Food's] disintegration in the stomach, its assimilation in the blood, its diaphoresis in the epidermis, its metempsychosis in the large intestine; its viscosity in okra, gumbo, oysters; its elasticity in jellies, its deliquescence in blancmanges; its tumescence in the throats of serpents, its slow erosion in the bellies of sharks; its odysseys through pastures, orchards, wheat fields, stock-yards, supermarkets, kitchens, pig troughs, rubbish dumps, disposals: the industries of sowing, hunting, cooking, milling, processing, and canning it; the wizardry of its mutations, ballooning in bread, subsiding in soufflés; raw and cooked, solid and melting, vegetable and mineral, fish, flesh, and fowl, encompassing the whole compendium of living substance. (Bennett, pp. 49-50; Ellmann, p. 112)

As our ingested food matter moves through its various phases, it simultaneously dissolves and enters into new processes of becoming "through forces of recombination that compose its potential directionalities" (Manning, p. 6). This is why Salvador Dali claims that "la machoire est notre meilleur instrument de connaissance philosophique" (the jaws are our most philosophic organs); for "quoi de plus philosophique que cet instant supreme ou vous aspirez avec lenteur la moelle d'un os qui craque encore sous vour molaires?" (what is more philosophic than the supreme moment when you languidly try to suck in the marrow of a bone that is being crushed by your molars?) (1952, p. 22).¹ The individual boundaries of the bones are shattered and one form of matter temporarily slides into, transgresses and transforms the structure of another. The yellow marrow, the fluid life of the bone (which incidentally also is a form of body fat) is consumed in one final crunch, but life is also formed in its sprawling digestive directions. As Bennett puts it, such vagabond matter "reveals the swarm of activity subsisting below and within formed bodies and recalcitrant things, a vitality obscured by our conceptual habit of dividing the world into inorganic matter and organic life" (p. 50).

Fat used in cooking, as an edible and nutritious substance, is of course as "organic" as our body fat, but there is still a sense in which it is considered inanimate or "life-less" – and our ingestion of fat (including the way we ingest it conceptually) confuses the boundaries between body and non-body. Contemporary media and fat-phobic advertising has taught us to consider each gram of butter on our sandwiches to literally transpose onto our stomachs, butts and thighs once it enters our systems. Unlike the proteins that build and sustain our muscular tissue, the boundaries

between which are never blurred (we never think that the steak or pork chop we eat actually *becomes* our muscles), fat in food and body fat is considered one and the same. We ingest it when we crave it, and we do our best to remove it (through dieting or liposuction) when it disturbs our ideal body image. The cultural conception of fat denies it any agency of its own. It is passive and pliable.

This is, of course, not the case from a scientific point of view. The tissue we refer to as body fat is not identical to the chemical substance known as fat. When fat is absorbed into the body it develops into adipose tissue. This is a connective tissue composed primarily of adipocytes; cells specifically developed to store energy in the form of fats. In reality, this tissue thus functions as a type of corporeal battery, harbouring vast quantities of energy, movement and heat within its walls. *The size of a pearl, the oily droplet. And that's just what we see. If we put it under the microscope, it's fractioned into segments, which are divided into cells. Each one contains so much fat it looks almost empty. However, at the centre there's a core, like the black nose on the face of a teddy bear. And there's movement. Building up, breaking down, producing heat and hormones.*



Fig. 2: adipose tissue cells, with 'teddy bear nose' nuclei
GE Healthcare, <<http://www.gelifesciences.com>>

Bennett argues that "the activity of metabolization, whereby the outside and inside mingle and recombine, renders more plausible the idea of vital materiality" (p.50). Body fat is the tissue through which the effects of metabolism, its fluidity and vitality, may be stored. These fat-filled folds of potential energy exemplify what Bennett imagines Michel Foucault would have called the "productive power" of food (Bennett, p. 40) in a way that defies both its spatiality and its temporality. Fat is movement, heat and life-in-becoming. It is formed through what Erin Manning would call an "intensity of preacceleration" (p. 13): it is a substance (or space) formed through potential duration.

The specific qualities and energy efficiency of the fatty substances stored in our bodies is dependent on the type of acids that make up their molecular structures and the acids' internal as well as inter-molecular spatial relationships. Chemically, fat is the collective and popular name of a subset of substances known as lipids. Fats are triglycerides, i.e. combinations of the alcohol glycerol and a three-part structure of different fatty acids (McMurray, p. 1088).

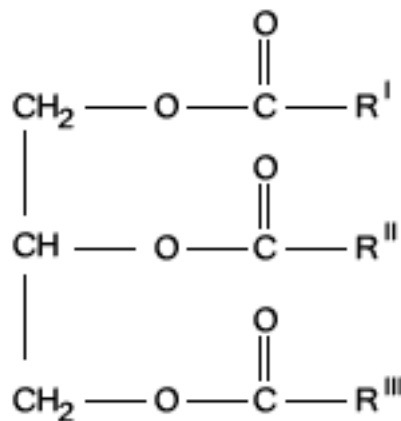


Fig. 3: basic chemical structure of fat (generic triglyceride)

Find Pulse, <<http://www.findpulse.com>>

There are many different types of fatty acids, but they are usually divided into three major groups: saturated, unsaturated and trans-isomer fats. Saturated fats have a high energy content and efficiency as they possess a simple and easily broken down molecular constitution and are able to "stack" themselves closely on a molecular level, resulting in a substance that is solid in room temperature (e.g. animal fats and lard) (McMurray, p. 1091). Unsaturated fats (mono- and poly-)²

have a firmer molecular structure (with at least one double bond between carbon and hydrogen atoms), which is energy-demanding to break down, and renders the molecule less prone to inter-molecular connection, thus resulting in a substance that is fluid (e.g. vegetable oils) unless it enters very cold environments (McMurray, pp. 1088–89). Finally there are trans-isomer fats (commonly known as trans fats) – low energy, “stackable” but yet at room temperature typically liquid fats, which are uncommon in nature and usually developed as a waste product when unsaturated fats are transformed into saturated fats for a desirable solid consistency that can be included in, for example, margarines. Trans fats have become known as the most “harmful” – and are thus the most demonised of the fatty acids available for consumption in Western societies, as many studies have shown that they increase the risk of coronary heart disease (McMurray, p. 279).

Like any chemical substance, fats have both fluid and solid states, but their propensity to remain fluid in room temperature is dependent on the molecular complexities and connective abilities of the three fatty acids that form their bases. Fluidity, from this point of view, comes to represent a form of disconnectedness (or decreased connectedness) and solidity becomes a closely knit, almost familial state. This echoes the idea of any identifiable and subjective type of embodiment as necessarily solid, as described by theorists like Luce Irigaray (see Elizabeth Stephens’s article in this special issue for a more thorough discussion of this concern). It also echoes Susie Orbach’s conception of body fat. Fluidity is a type of escapism, characterising the type of matter that passes through us (or in the case of fat, lingers on top, beneath and between the various parts of our body proper), without becoming *part* of our embodied structures. There is thus a sense in which fluid fat becomes the exemplar vagabond matter – it goes through any number of “temporary congealments of materiality”, becoming an integral and catalysing agent in each structure it encounters, but is never constricted to just one form.

Digestive Fat

There are many uses of fat and adipose tissue in our bodies, and numerous types of fat cells that accommodate our different needs. Lipids are the largest constituent of the myelin that surround our neurons (brain and nerve cells) and are pivotal for fast conduction of impulses and commands between various parts of the body and the brain. Various types of adipose tissue also surround and buffer each of our internal organs, muscles, blood vessels and tendons (Dani & Billon, p. 17).³ Fat is not merely a “passive” insulating substance, however. All adipose tissue has an important

endocrine function, actively producing hormones and various neural signal substances (Veilleux & Tchernof, p. 123). Brown adipose tissue furthermore generates heat. This is an important process developed through mitochondrial “uncoupling”, movement and transformation (Klingenspor & Fromme, p. 39).

There is a vast array of bodily processes incorporating fat – far more than we have space to discuss in this short article. We will thus narrow our scope. Considering the specific focus on edible matter and eating habits that tend to follow cultural considerations of fat, we have decided to focus on abdominal adipose tissue – and we specifically want to contemplate how this fat interacts with the intestines. The abdominal tract is interwoven with tiny blood vessels and adipose tissue, forming an intricate web of energy production and storage. The fat inside our abdominal cavity is composed of many different intertwining and intermingling types of white adipose tissue and is different both in function and appearance from inter-muscular, skeletal and subcutaneous fat, the type we would usually recognise as the wobbly tissue stored under the skin. Known as visceral fat, it is semi-fluid and inconsistently spaced (Veilleux & Tchernof, p.134). When separated from the body the gastro-intestinal tract does not look like a sausage rope, like many popular zombie moves and contemporary anatomical models would have you believe. It looks like a pulsating, shape shifting flesh flower, connected to the abdominal wall through petals of adipose tissue and blood vessels. Their edges are laced with yellow visceral fat droplets that glisten and are soft to the touch.

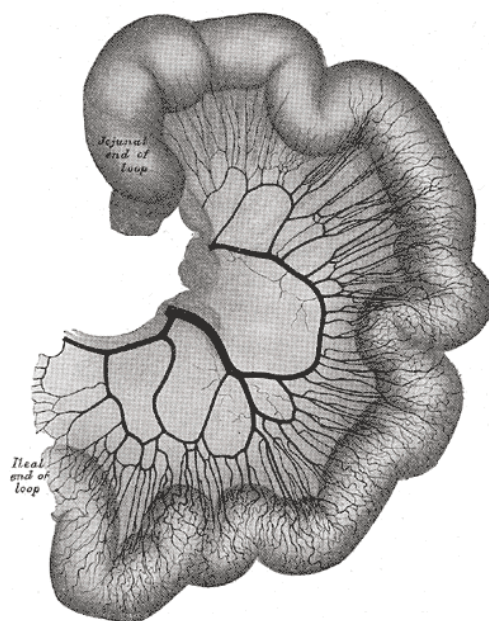


Fig 4.: loop of the small intestine, unfolded

Gray, *Anatomy of the Human Body*, Fig. 535, <http://www.bartleby.com>

I can still hear the sound of flesh separating from flesh as we tore the abdominal walls apart, me standing on one side and the surgeon on the other. It was the first time this woman's body was opened and the intestines enfolded on top of the yellow detergent skin, one shimmering loop after another. Pink, propelling, pulsating flesh. The surgeon pushed them to the side, to me. I tried to catch hold of them, but they were slippery to my touch, like wet rose petals. We were strangers, who forced our fingers through the yellow semi-fluid fat droplets, lifting the connective tissue with pliers before cutting a hole into the woman's body. The intestines wriggling, squirming, like worms in the sun.

Visceral abdominal fat is one of the most intimate, but also one of the most threatening of the fats in our bodies. It has been linked to type 2 Diabetes, Insulin Resistance and a number of inflammatory diseases (Veilleux & Tchernof, p. 134). It is the fat we don't see, the fat we don't know to be frightened of, and the fat that can't easily be removed through liposuction or simple dietary strategies. Visceral fat is formed in our inner sanctum and remains in our inner sanctum, becoming a secret, parasitic and semi-fluid part of our gastro-intestinal tract. As the digestive system will never quite regain its integrative balance after surgery, it is best kept untouched and unseen. The fluid exchange between edible matter and corporeal materiality is unrepresentable and irreparable.

They were not meant for our gaze – the intestines. They were her secret; the unknown guardian deciding what to incorporate into her body and what to discard. Now they were breached, broken. Next time she is being opened, and there is always a next time, it will be different. No more magic. The skin of her intestinal walls will be white and hurt, and the petals will stick to each other like crystalised floral candy.

Distilled Fat

The digestive system is our body's point of exchange between outside and inside. It is the organ that transforms the life and flesh of strangers (plants, animal or others) into the life and flesh of our own. Despite its openness to the external world, it cannot bear to be opened. It's simultaneously naked and clothed; fearlessly absorptive and exquisitely vulnerable.

Returning to the Gasconne duck confit we started our text with, we will dedicate the final part of our ruminations to the process that turns living fatty tissue into grease, lard or fat for consumption. Duck confit is particularly well suited for our purposes because of its powerfully suggestive cooking process. When the duck meat is slowly cooked in its own fat, it is returned to its nurturing and life-giving juices, vitalised for a moment in our mouths, before it's slowly ground down and restructured in our digestive system. It is what characterises the subtle transition from living flesh to dead meat. It reminds us of the proximity between eater and eaten, and of the destructive circularity of life.

Duck confit was originally a peasant dish and a cheap and practical means of curing or preserving meat. Over the centuries, it has become regarded as a delicacy, however, particularly because of the simultaneously firm and moist consistency produced through the process and the surprising leanness of the meat as it eventually emerges from its fatty submersion. The dish thwarts our expectations, defies the norms and reformulates the general consistencies of dark bird meat. According to Edward Schneider, duck confit is thought to be the result of a fairly common fifteenth- or sixteenth-century preservative technique – and to decipher the cultural discourses imbued in such a venture, we will thus turn to the philosophies of fat in circulation at the time of its conception.

The oscillation between fluidity and solidity, living flesh and dead meat has been a concern in the discussion of body fat at least since the Greek philosopher and physician Galen of Pergamon in the second century AD. The English seventeenth-century physician Helkiah Crooke dedicates a considerable portion of his anatomical treatise *Mikrokosmographia – A Description of the Body of Man* pondering over the function and makeup of fat.⁴ Drawing heavily on the humoral medicine of Galen and Hippocrates,⁵ he decides that fat is “ingendered of the more oylie, thinn, and ayrie portion of pure and absolutely laboured and concocted bloud”, created in the liver, brewed and nourished in the stomach and finally “distilling like a dew out of the smal and capillarie veins of the habite of the body” (p. 73). This is a carefully measured and exact process: the “bloude is curdled by a moderate heate (for burning heate would consume it, and a weake heat would not concoct it” (p. 73). Indeed, blood “concocted” or “distilled” at various temperatures, pressures and speeds may transform into a number of vital substances, like semen, breast milk and spinal fluid.

Fat, according to early modern medicine is thus primarily engineered *in* our bodies, and *for* our bodies, rather than imported through our diets from other animals' bodies.⁶ Depending on the position of the fat and the function it is meant to serve (cushioning, insulating or accelerating), Crooke argues that fat can be made thicker or thinner and yellower or whiter, so that all the body may be "plump, equall, soft, white and beautifull" (p. 74). Although he recognises that this is true of the fat found in, and consumed from other animals as well as in humans, he firmly claims that human fat is different; "The Fat of a man is lesse white then of any other creature" (p. 73). The dictates of humoural medicine forbids Crooke to think of human and animal fat in anything like a similar light. As a manifestation of blood, corporeal fat is an intensely human and vitalising fluid, since blood according to the Ancient Greek tradition carries and materialises the animating spirits, life and soul of the body.

Despite this, the early modern physicians also tread a fine line in their negotiation of human fat and animal "grease" or "lard". Crooke recognises that the fat in our bodies in some extreme circumstances may become a source of nutrition:

in great famines and want of sustenance, it is conuerted into Ailment, and becommeth the Fother whereon the naturall heate relieueth it selfe. For being dissolued it aquireth the forme of a bloud-like vapour which returneth into the veines, and so becommeth for want of better, a subsidiarie nourishment of the partes. (Crooke, p. 74)

Also here, human fat both is and isn't essential to the body – and both is and isn't separate from ingested animal fats. In its negotiation with the stomach and digestive system – the "kiln" of the human body – it is continually transformed from nourishment to flesh and back to nourishment once more. It is the metamorphic material, and well as the "grease", which "moistens" and "supples" the machinery of its own transformation.

Humoural medicine, like our contemporary biomedical sciences, thus considers fat a polymorphic and multi-functional concept. It is a substance that stabilises, cools, insulates and moistens, and simultaneously heats, excites and sets the body in motion. The conceptually contradictory *raison d'être* is what gives this solid fluid its particular vitalising power. It is not one substance, but two (or more) – and its connotations rub against each other, creating cultural friction. It is what Irigaray

would consider a culturally fluid entity as well as an actual fluid, confusing boundaries and folding surrounding forms into its embrace. This fluidity is welcoming, warm, all-enveloping and open-ended. Fat nourishes us and moves us – not only physically but spiritually. It is a substance we share. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick shows in *Fat Art, Thin Art*, fat brings us closer to one another. As she hugs her husband and his fat touches hers, the flesh of their bodies combine and melt into one (p. 15). For Sedgwick, fat thus becomes a material manifestation of intimacy and love. It is the substance that allows her to move outside of herself. It becomes a bridge as well as a continually morphing boundary between her body and its environment.

This is what “wobbliness” comes to mean in this context. We may find it disconcerting. We may do everything in our power to maintain a solid and stable, harmonious or balanced body, but our subcutaneous fat always already disrupts such false stases. We wobble and wag – our bodies enfold on themselves and others whether we want them to or not. The meeting of fat folds incites the most illicit of touches, comforting and arousing even as it terrifies. We become two, three or many as the fatty extensions of our bodies caress and embrace themselves. But most important, perhaps, the fat on our bodies makes us question and appreciate what it is to be alive. Even if we try to deny it – even if they seem alien and lifeless – we’re all subtly aware that our fat cells are a vital part of us, responding to our signs and signals and carrying our genetic code. Fat may be less substantial and predictable than some of our other tissues, but it remains structurally intact through its fluctuations. Indeed, it’s fat’s transformative and fluid motions that sustains us and gives us life.

Notes

¹ Our translation.

² Unsaturated fats are further divided into mono-unsaturated (one carbon-hydrogen double bond) and poly-unsaturated (several carbon-hydrogen double bonds) fats, which produce different energy content depending on the amount complexity of double-bonded molecular structures (McMurray, pp. 1088-89).

³ Adipose tissue is usually divided into a white and brown variety, the first of which is primarily used for insulation and energy storage and can be found between muscles, in the brain, in the skeleton and to different degrees (depending on body size) under the skin. Brown adipose tissue is located primarily around the blood vessels of the neck and the thorax region (Dani & Billon, p. 2).

- ⁴ Interestingly, despite Crooke's lengthy discussion, body fat is never featured in any of his many anatomical drawings in *Mikrokosmographia*.
- ⁵ See Ania Chromik's article in this special issue for a more general discussion of humoral medicine. Its basic premise is that health may be sustained as long as the body keeps a moderate temperature, and a balance is found between the four essential fluids; blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The practice of medicine or "physic" is a negotiation between hot and cold, moist and dry humours, substances and practices.
- ⁶ We have not found any references to plant fats in early modern medical texts. Discussions of body fat seem to be entirely focused on the animal kingdom.

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Forthcoming Publications

***A matter of lifedeath* Conference Proceedings I-III 48.2, 48.3, 48.4 (June, Sep., Dec. 2015)** The proceedings issues will feature keynote lectures given by Andrea Carlino, Françoise Dastur, and Elisabeth Weber, along with selected papers presented by participants. Together these essays reflect the conference's engagement with questions of life and death in ways that avoid reductive gestures and exceed oppositions between animate and inanimate, human and animal, presence and absence, the humanities and the sciences, the living and the dead.

Recent Publications

QUEER/AFFECT 48.1 (Mar. 2015) This issue examines the potential of queer intervention into affect theory, exploring non-normative ways of feeling, existing, and relating. Essay topics include emotion and expression, trauma theory, collectivity, shame, desire, queer subjectivity, and performativity, among others.

FEATURING: MICHAEL NAAS 47.4 (Dec. 2014) This issue features a "Crossings" interview with Michael Naas, Professor of Philosophy at DePaul University. The issue also features two new essays by Professor Naas on photography and cinematography in the works of Hélène Cixous.

ROMANCE 47.2 (June 2014) This *Mosaic* special issue engages the rich history of the word "Romance," with essays on "the romantic," the roman, romantic fiction, Romanticism, "the Romantics," and the state of the love story in literature and film.

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